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VOL. 22.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED, AND OTHER STORIES.
BY MRS. PARR.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

BERLIN

A. ASHER & CO. UNTER DEN LINDEN.

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HOW IT ALL HAPPENED AND OTHER STORIES.
BY LOUISA PARR.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED
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By LOUISA PARR
AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY FOX"

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

BERLIN
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"HOW IT ALL HAPPENED."

RAT-TAT—that's the postman—two letters for Mrs Olinthus Lobb, Cedar Villa, Putney, and Charlotte says, "If you please, ma'am, two letters for you." Nonsense, I must be dreaming, and I shall awake to find myself still Miss Britannia Plummidge.

I have been married six weeks last Wednesday, and yet now, when anybody suddenly calls me Mrs Lobb, I have to pinch myself to make sure I am still flesh and blood. Ah! young people get accustomed to things quickly; but when you have been called by one name for forty-seven years, it seems impossible ever to change it. However, I've changed mine, by a miracle, for nothing short of one can effect a marriage in Binfield. I am sure I do not wish to speak against my native place. It is the sweetest village in England, and for maiden ladies a most advantageous locality as regards economy and society, but, in my present position, I may make bold to say it *has* one drawback. There are no bachelors in it; boys abound, promising youths

"How it all happened," etc. I.

with nothing to do are not uncommon, but a man with position and an income, however small, is never seen in Binfield without a wife by his side. Is it any wonder then that I, not at all a beauty, should have some little bewilderment in identifying myself as wife of Olinthus Lobb, Esq., and mistress of Cedar Villa?

Now I am going to tell how it all happened. Pamela and I are the daughters of a Colonel in the army. He had retired as long ago as I can remember; and when he died he left us our little cottage and £60 a year. He denied himself many a comfort to do this, and the memory of our father is very dear to us. We tried to do as he would have wished us, and some years ago when Mr Thompson, a most respectable man, but a miller, offered me his hand and heart, Pamela said, "No, we have our father's position to maintain." So I had to decline, very reluctantly I must own, for he was a widower, and my heart seemed to long to take care of those two dear little girls. After that one offer I never got another, and I began to resign myself to what seemed my ordained portion. Not that this was an easy task, for I am not like Pam. She is a very extraordinary woman; indeed many people say she ought to be a man. Pam is one of those

people who never give way, and I really could not say which is strongest, her mind or her body, both being gigantic. If she has been walking about all day and is brought to confess that she is a little tired, the only way you ever see her take her ease is by sitting bolt upright in her chair. The suggestion of a sofa or couch would be met by a withering look of scorn, only to be produced by one of those long noses with a bump in the middle. Pam is very proud of the family nose. I have often looked at her when in repose—I mean after she has retired—lying with her arms crossed, really reminding one of those noble crusaders, or figures of the middle ages, one sees in cathedrals.

Things in this life go by contraries, else why was not I christened Pamela and she Britannia? Our mother so admired the novel, that she begged her first-born might be called by the heroine's sweet name. This was one of the few occasions on which my father gave way, but even then conditionally—that he should choose the name of the second; and he chose the name of Britannia, and, unfortunately, I was the second. When we were children he always called me *his* chick, and if we had a dispute he invariably whistled or hummed "Rule Britannia." But this did not last long, for no one could rule

Pam. Even as a child, I felt her mental superiority. Why, at school I remember her repeating all the rules of grammar, perfectly; scorning to copy the answer of a sum; and positively understanding the use of the globes. There was but one occasion on which I felt the gratification of superiority, and that was when, during the dancing lesson, I caught our dear mother's approving smile as she watched me. Pam detested dancing, for having very long thin limbs, she did not show to advantage in that accomplishment. I am still an admirer of Terpsichore, but if I stand up for a quadrille with the children, I always feel I am making myself ridiculous in Pam's eyes. I am very fond of children and young people, and nothing has made me more pleased than when some dear girl, whom I have known from a child, has confided to me her little love story.

I am afraid Pam is right. I am rather romantic. I have often felt so sorry for myself that I had no early love story of my own to look back upon—it keeps one's heart young and fresh. Pam says women were meant for higher things than sitting thinking of lovers and whom they shall marry. Well, of course, she is right, but I really do not know that the women who take to chemistry, astronomy, and all the

ologies, are a bit the happier or more amiable; and I am sure some of the sweetest natures and kindest hearts I have met with, have belonged to pretty vain pussies who delighted in turning the heads of all the men they met, no matter whether they were eighteen or eighty. I must confess I have often felt grateful that men *are* weak. Nobody can thoroughly understand this unless it has been their privilege to be associated with a strong-minded superior woman. Dear me! what a repose they are then! I feel it must have been a great trial to dear Pam to live with me, not being a kindred mind. When I have thought her feeling dull on this account, and have tried to get up a little argument, how completely I have failed—my knowledge has utterly forsaken me. And positively, sometimes, I had imagined from her silence that she was getting interested! But when I got to the end of my say, then she would fix her eye upon me with, "Britannia, may I ask you, as a personal favour, never to display your lamentable ignorance 'before a third person.'" Either this, or I committed a *lapsus linguæ* in my mode of expression, and then, trying feebly to defend myself on the score of Walker or Maunder, Pam would demand, in a voice which seemed to run cold down my back-bone, "May I ask who Walker and Maun-

der may be?" I really felt quite confused, because I had not the slightest idea, for, except in the dictionaries, I never heard of either of the gentlemen. It is certainly most provoking in me to be so stupid; and one of my great pleasures now is, to hope that by sending many nice comforts to my dear sister I shall prove I have not been unmindful of her forbearance.

So Pam and I began to get old—she got thinner and I got fatter. The people we remembered as grown up when we were young, dropped off one by one. It seemed such a long time since we were children; everything was altered; what were facts then were idle stories now; boys and girls of ten and twelve put me to the blush—the parts of speech were entirely confused. Places which used to be in one country were in another now. There was no William Tell, and no Joan of Arc. Henry VIII. was a good fatherly man, and Richard III., instead of "wading to the throne in the blood of his dearest relatives," lived and died an exemplary brother and uncle. People we had seen married were grandfathers and grandmothers; children we had seen christened had boys and girls who called us Old Pam and the Ancient Briton.

Binfield is about twenty miles from London. It

was our rule to go to town twice a year to receive our dividends, to buy any special article of dress we needed, and to feast our eyes on the tempting beauties displayed in the shop windows. This had been a plan of our dear father's, and during the London day we often spoke of him—how surprised he would have been at this alteration, at that improvement, or how pleased to see something which drew forth our wonder or admiration. On this particular occasion Pam had been staying with a friend of ours at Pentonville, and we agreed that we should meet to do our business, spend the day, and return home together in the evening. I always felt quite knocked up after one of those days; but we could not accept our friend's invitation to stay the night, as we had a return ticket. Travelling is expensive, and Pam said our position obliged us to go first class. Dear! dear! I have sometimes been led to ask myself why money and position do not always go together. The one is very trying without the other. The many things we have been obliged to do, and also to do without, because it would not become our position! Pam would never hear of a charwoman, but we must have a servant. And, really, girls have enormous appetites and very ungrateful dispositions, or our Susan never could have

said we were mean. But perhaps I'm hard on the poor thing. Had she known how often Pam and I declared to each other we couldn't eat another morsel—though far from being satisfied—in order that she might have a good dinner, she would not, I think, have said we were mean.

But to return to the morning on which I was to go to London alone. Five minutes to nine the train was to start; but I was so afraid of not being in time, that I was ready at half-past seven. It being ridiculous to leave home at that hour, I took up a book—not that I could read either, because of the unpleasant feeling that I might forget something which Pam would be certain to ask for. Eight o'clock struck. It would only take twenty minutes to walk slowly to the station, and I had then half an hour to spare. No matter, I would start at the quarter past, in case of accidents. And a very fortunate thing it was I did start; for I had passed Bull's Cross when I discovered I had no pocket-handkerchief. However, I had time to hurry back and put one in my pocket. Ah! how little I thought that that trifling incident would be the means of bringing about the great event of my life!

When I reached the platform I looked about, but saw nobody I knew. The guard put me into

an empty carriage, and though several of our gentlemen passed they only nodded "good morning." So alone I started, but not to remain alone long, for at every station people got in and got out until we reached Chingford. Here I thought I was to be left by myself again, but just as the train was moving off a middle-aged gentleman rushed up. The guard opened the door of my carriage, and he was obliged to jump in, making use, as I thought, of such an improper expression that if Pamela had been there she would certainly have given him in charge. But our ears often deceive us. I have since found out that he merely remarked, on finding a lady alone, "*dame seule*." Still at the time I felt rather indignant, and looked at the offender with some curiosity. He was a very thin, tall man, and so oddly dressed, that I began to feel a little uncomfortable, and wish some one else was in the carriage with me. Why should he wear white trousers? The day was not warm. Were they made of duck or jean? I suppose I must have been scanning his garb, for presently he said in a loud voice—

"Well, madam, may I ask if you see anything peculiar in my dress that you are honouring it with so much attention?"

I really thought I must have sunk through the

seat of the carriage. Oh, if Pamela had been there! I tried to stammer out an apology, and he waved his hand with what seemed an ironical leer, saying, "Oh, no offence, no offence." Well, what with my confusion and annoyance, I was ready to faint. I felt I must have a little air, so without a thought I pulled down the window. In an instant he fired out again—

"Bless me, madam, you are quite at liberty to commit suicide, of course, but you don't want to commit murder too."

Murder! suicide! Oh, dear, dear, what should I do! would the train never reach the next station! He must have seen my terror, for he said—

"There, there, don't look as if you thought I was mad; but if you suffered from rheumatism as I do, madam, you'd look upon a person who put you in a draught as your natural enemy."

I certainly felt devoutly thankful now that Pamela was not with me, or there would have been quite a scene. We stopped once more and took in two ladies and a gentleman. The train moved on, and soon I heard my gruff neighbour tuttutting, and muttering something he would do to somebody, when I discovered that his nose was beginning to

bleed, and he was searching vainly in his pocket for a handkerchief.

I must confess my first feeling was not one of sorrow for him. He had been what I considered offensive to me—an unprotected female with nobody to retaliate for her; but then I remembered how near I had been in a similar plight to his: had I not started at the time I did, I should have been minus a handkerchief too. I involuntarily put my hand in my pocket. Yes, there it lay neatly folded up; but I would not take it out to make matters worse by unnecessary display. At this time the poor gentleman was obliged to put his head out of the window. The ladies exchanged looks expressive of anything but pleasure; the young man eyed him with a stare of the most profound indifference, as if it were the usual thing to travel with people who chose that their noses should bleed; and he did not desire to interfere with him, only he wished to impress upon us that *he* was at no loss, for he produced a spotless handkerchief, slowly shook it out, and used it most unnecessarily, and I thought heartlessly; and then a small voice began to whisper, "Britannia Plummidge, are you acting a Christian's part? Have you never heard a story of a good Samaritan?"

I put my hand into my pocket again; I tried to feel if it was one of my best handkerchiefs. I argued that if I had two it would be different, but you were not supposed to distress yourself for somebody you didn't know. Why, one might do nothing else but give away pocket-handkerchiefs! Then there was Pamela; she would never approve of it, and must never know of it. Oh, it was exactly like one of my Quixotic fits. I might be quite certain I was making myself ridiculous, and I resolved to entertain the notion no longer. But, in spite of trying to look at the passing scenery, and to consider what I should purchase, how best lay out my small amount of money, memory *would* recall the "sweet story of old," and I could but hang my head from a feeling that I was not one of those who tried to "go and do likewise."

A Plummidge hang her head! My father's daughter ashamed to look the whole world in the face! I am one of the weak specimens of my sex, I know; but at that moment Pamela herself could not have felt more bold. Without a moment's hesitation I handed my nice new handkerchief, embroidered with "B. P." in the corner, saying—

"I am afraid, sir, you are put to inconvenience. Will you accept this? I shall not require it."

I could not see his face; but from the side glance I got, I think it wore an expression of great astonishment. However, he took the handkerchief without a word, and I quite imagined he did not intend thanking me. Presently he drew in his head, his face looking redder than ever by the close proximity of the white handkerchief, and said—

"Madam, I am obliged to you—very much obliged to you. Madam, you're an angel. You're more: you're a woman, and the only one in the carriage, too."

Here he perfectly glared at the two ladies, who didn't seem to mind it; though, had it been me, I should have felt as if I could have shrunk into a nutshell.

We were soon at our journey's end. My companion helped me out with the greatest politeness, and then, with the manners of a courtier, said, "May I be permitted to inquire where I shall have the pleasure of returning this?" still holding the handkerchief in his hand.

Now this was embarrassing. Pamela might blame me severely; and I should never hear the last of my indelicate liberty. Yet I felt I should like to get my handkerchief back. So after a moment I told him not to trouble himself, but should he be

passing the station, he might give it to the guard of the Binfield train, directed to "Miss B. Plummidge, Binfield Station, to be left until called for." He lifted his hat, and I was soon looking out for an omnibus to take me to the appointed meeting-place with Pamela.

She was there, and we spent a delightful day. After we had done our business and shopping, we went to a museum in Jermyn Street, where there were stones and fossils, about which dear Pamela seemed to know much more than the gentleman who showed us over. She caught him tripping two or three times; and this put her in such good humour that she stopped before all the shops in Regent Street where I wanted to look in. Now, this was very kind, for I am sure any one who could even recollect those dreadful names of things which existed before Adam and Noah must feel it a great come-down to be asked to look at French muslins at ten and-sixpence, and bonnets, "as worn in Paris," at one guinea.

I experienced some little inconvenience from the want of my handkerchief, such as when Pam would tell me to take a "black" off my nose. I had then to contrive to get behind her, and furtively rub it off with my glove. Tired enough we were when

we reached home that night, but we had seen plenty to think of and to talk about. The next week passed rapidly enough, when one evening, as Pam and I were taking a walk near the station, one of the porters came up and said to me—

"If you please, Miss, there's a parcel for you here. I should have brought it up, but it says 'to be left till called for'."

Was ever anything so unfortunate? I felt I was getting red, and that Pamela's eye was on me. It is certainly a great misfortune to be such a weak creature as I am. I felt guilty of quite a crime at that moment, and by a great effort could only stammer out something about a person's nose bleeding, and that I had lent them my handkerchief. If Pamela would only not ask if the person were a man or a woman, and if I could but conceal that it was I who offered the handkerchief! Vain thought! In five minutes I felt that Pam had turned me inside out, and shaken every scrap of the affair out of me.

She preserved a solemn silence, and we reached the station and met the porter with a large brown-paper parcel.

"There must be some mistake," I said; "mine was but a pocket-handkerchief."

I hesitated and debated; but hesitation and debating were cut short by Pam desiring the man to take the parcel to our house; and an ominous silence was maintained till we reached home.

I remember with what trepidation I then asked whether we had not better open the parcel, and see what was in it; and, though Pamela was dying of curiosity, she only said she had no desire to interfere with me in such a matter. So I cut the string, and soon my bewildered eyes were fixed on a pink brocaded silk, so rich and stiff, that it would have stood alone. But there was no name, no handkerchief, nothing. I couldn't describe Pamela's wrath, nor my distress. I only know that that evening I felt that henceforth I was to be regarded as a bold woman, and a disgrace to the name of Plumidge.

And what was to be done with the unfortunate parcel? I couldn't keep it, and I couldn't send it back, because I didn't know the name of the sender. Why did I lend my handkerchief? and, when I did lend it, why was I so mean as ever want to have it back again?

Matters stood thus when we received an invitation to dinner from our doctor's wife. Now, we often went out to tea, or to small evening parties;

but the circle in which we moved, in Binfield, was not much given to asking friends to dine. So this was rather an event for us. Pam became a trifle more gracious, and by the day named she was almost herself. I could have hugged her, I felt so glad not to feel the Pariah I had done for the last ten days. Pam looked very well—quite handsome I thought. I am the best work-woman, and I had trimmed her black silk with some nice lace a cousin of ours had given me, and felt quite proud of my work and my sister.

I was too taken up with the delight of having all pleasant again to think much about how I looked. Besides, Pam is so clever that people were not in the habit of taking much notice of me, unless they were deaf or invalids, and then they seemed to like to talk to me. Quite prepared to enjoy myself at Dr Fletcher's, I entered the drawing-room behind Pam, when—oh, it couldn't be—yes, it was—there on the sofa sat my eccentric friend of the railway carriage. I am perfectly sure if my nerves hadn't given way I should have rushed out. As it was, everything and everybody seemed swimming about the room; a gurgling of water sounded in my ears, and a voice seemed to come from a long way off, whispering, "Mr Olinthus

Lobb, Miss Britannia Plummidge." For fully ten minutes I had not the slightest idea what any one said or did. However, when I seemed to return to the world about me, everybody was talking most agreeably to everybody else, and I began to breathe again, especially when I saw that my friend did not intend showing that we had ever met before. We spent a delightful evening. Pam was quite charmed with our new acquaintance. He gave way to her, agreed with her opinions, and, though he took but little notice of me, treated us both with the greatest politeness.

I declare I thought Pam had made a conquest when he insisted on seeing us home, and asked permission to call and inquire after us the next morning. Pam had found out that Mr Lobb was an old friend of Dr Fletcher's, and under the shield of a fiery, quick manner, and very eccentric appearance, was always doing the kindest actions, which he would never acknowledge, or permit himself to be thanked for. Mrs Fletcher said she advised the unmarried ladies to look after him, as he was very well off, and devoted to ladies, though, from having had an early disappointment, and spending most of his life in India and China, he had never been married.

That night, when Pam had left me, I opened my

drawers and looked at the pink brocade, and smiled to think, that after all I might wear that "bone of contention" at Pam's wedding, and that then she might be more indulgent about my indelicate boldness in offering my handkerchief to a stranger. I made up my mind to speak to him about the parcel, should I have an opportunity, as in case of nothing coming of his attentions I could send it back. But I would be very careful in my manner and in what I said, so as not to endanger my dear sister's prospects.

A week passed, and still Mr Lobb was at Binfield. He had a room at the "Dragon," and his attentions were getting almost pointed. I never dared breathe my thoughts to Pam, not knowing how she would take it; but when it came to inviting the Fletchers and ourselves to a little picnic, and he giving Pam his arm most of the way, I began to think she must see that all this meant something. I had never been able to speak to him; but the day after the picnic he called. Pam was out, so I mustered up courage, and told him of the parcel I had received, which I was sure had come from him; and though I knew how kindly he meant it, still I thought I would rather not accept it, as——

"As what?" he said. "You think this little trifle

came from me, and yet you won't accept it? Now, I tell you what it is, Miss Britannia, I will offer you something else, and if you refuse that—why, I'll—I'll burn the dress, and I'll return—no I won't—whatever comes I'll keep that handkerchief;" and upon the spot he offered me his hand and heart, and asked me to be Mrs Lobb.

I was never more surprised, though Pam said afterwards if she ever allowed thoughts of the kind to enter her mind she should have had her suspicions. But I cannot tell how thankful I was to find Pam had not taken his attentions as meaning anything but a tribute to her superiority.

I used to smile sometimes as I saw what an amusement I and my old lover were to the young people. They could not comprehend the quiet enjoyment we looked forward to in going down the hill of life together; they were rather frightened at the red face and sharp voice, and could not understand that his heart was as fresh as that of the youngest of those who laughed.

I was pleased to find that many people would miss me and be sorry to lose me; and when we were married, notwithstanding Mr Lobb gave my old people a dinner, and my school children a treat, there were sad faces at parting. My dear husband

says he is getting all his sharp edges rasped off, and he knows his friends think him hen-pecked, and pity him. Not a day passes without my making some fresh discovery of his goodness and consideration; already he has a scheme in his head for the settlement of dear Pam. I hardly know whether to desire it, though. If she were not such a superior person I should have no hesitation, for certainly the greatest happiness a woman can know is to have some one to lean upon and protect her, and whom, in her turn, she can look after, and be of use to. Still my sister would never value this privilege as I do. She is far above all the weaknesses of our frail sex, and I think perhaps, all things considered, she and Mr Potter might not be comfortable together. When I venture to say so to Mr Lobb (for though I *call* him Olinthus, I don't seem able to *think* of him as that yet), he pooh-poohs all my scruples, saying he knows Sam Potter better than I do,—which, of course, is perfectly correct, for he possesses an amazing insight into character, and manages people in a wonderful way. At first I used to feel quite nervous at his joking with Pam, but somehow she takes things from him which she wouldn't from any one else, and so she possibly might the suggestion of a husband. Mr. Potter is

a most amiable, kind man. He never comes to see us without bringing me quite a handsome present, which I should be perfectly contented with, only he always seems to have been undecided between two things, and finally to have decided on the wrong one; and the whole of his visit he does nothing but lament that he has not brought the thing which he has left behind. Mr Lobb laughs at me for feeling uncomfortable on this score; he says it is little Sam's way, and I suppose it has been the poor man's failing through life, for during the time he and Mr Lobb were in China he made up his mind he would get married. Many years before, he had met two sisters in England, and was only prevented then from making his offer because he could not decide between them; and this indecision still worried him. At length, however, he resolved upon writing to the younger of the two; she accepted his offer, consented to go out to him, and all things seemed favourable, except that a feeling of regret immediately entered into his mind that he had not selected the other one. He began recalling all her amiable qualities, accomplishments, good looks—things he had never remembered before his fate was comparatively settled. Unfortunately my dear husband was obliged to go to Japan about this time, or he would never have

allowed his friend to act so foolishly; but I am sorry to say that on her arrival Mr. Potter permitted the lady to discover his vain regret that she was not her sister. My dear husband says she was one of my sort, which means, poor thing, that she was a weak, foolish body; and so plain did it seem to her that, if she married him, she should be standing in her sister's light, that she insisted on returning to England,—and, as I said at the time Mr Lobb related it, I should have done the same.

"Then," exclaimed Pam, "you would have done a very foolish thing. If the man did not know his own mind, it was her place to teach him;" at which Mr Lobb (for he doesn't hesitate with Pam one bit) slapped her heartily on the back, and said she was the woman he took her for.

Well, to continue my story, when the lady told the reason of her return, her friends all blamed her for acting foolishly, her sister positively refused to go out in her place and poor Mr Potter was left a bachelor, feeling himself bound in some way to two ladies, neither of whom would marry him. All this happened nearly twenty years ago. Since then he has quite lost sight of them, and though he is as anxious as ever to get settled, he has not been fortunate enough to find a person to suit him.

Now that Mr Lobb is married, he is worse off than ever, for he has nobody to make up his mind for him, and he really seems to be thoroughly uncomfortable. He and Pam have met several times. And now Mr Lobb (should we go sight-seeing) always says, "Pam, my dear, I put my friend Potter under your wing;" and after that we don't see much more of them, but I think they enjoy themselves, for upon our return dear Pam seems in a good temper. And as for Mr Potter, he is never tired of talking to me about my sister's superiority and intellect, and he has told my husband that he considers Pam to be an uncommonly fine woman, and (in answer to a little joking from Mr Lobb) that he only wished he had a chance, he should be proud of laying at her feet his fortune (which is a very comfortable one), and the name of Potter (which I believe is exceedingly respectable, for he always puts great stress upon their being "the Suffolk Potters, not the Lincolnshire Potters, you know,"—though I'm sure I don't know, but Pam evidently does, because she said she was glad of that). Pam is very open with him, she speaks her mind and gives her opinion most freely. I really felt quite uncomfortable at the way she went on when he lost her umbrella; she insisted on its being

downright carelessness, and turned a deaf ear to his excuses, until he had to give in, and admit that it *was* carelessness; and after that she seemed better satisfied, although when he replaced it with a beautiful green silk one, she told him (rather unnecessarily, I thought) to remember this was not the one he had lost, about which there could be no mistake, for we had had our brown umbrellas for at least six years, and they only cost us 7 shillings and 11 pence in St Pauls Churchyard, in the first instance.

I dwell a great deal upon my sister's prospects, for her happiness is very dear to me, and it is exceedingly difficult to decide what is best for those so much above oneself in resources of their own. I have been rather strengthened in the thought that the idea is not wholly displeasing to her, since Mr Lobb, the last time she came here, addressed her as Mrs Potter, and (though she held up her finger reprovingly) she positively smiled. One of these letters is from her; perhaps she may say whether she intends coming to see us next week or not.

"Gracious me! Mr Lobb! Olinthus!" I exclaim, as my husband, having just returned from town, comes into the room. "What do you think?"

"Why, that your sister has consented to become

Mrs Potter. I met the little man coming to tell us in a state of the greatest excitement. He considers she has done him the most extraordinary honour, and he told me at least twenty times that she is a most wonderful woman."

"Well, Pamela is by no means an ordinary person; I never cease wondering how it was you chose me instead of her."

"Ha, ha, ha! we two should never have saddled together. No, no, my dear, there'd have been nothing left of old Lin Lobb then; there's very little now except his duck inexpressibles;" and he adds, looking at me with his kind twinkling eyes, "Those I'll never leave off, for they first attracted the attention of the woman who has made me the happiest man in England."

TRETHILL FARM.

I.

TRETHILL FARM was the most rambling, old-fashioned, inconvenient place you ever saw, yet it was most picturesquely situated. After having toiled up Parson's Hill, and enjoyed the view from it, you then went down the lane, across Warleigh Woods, and suddenly came upon the quaintest old house in the world, with black beams and diamond-paned windows. There was a green plat in front, with a big walnut-tree growing in it, and close by a water-mill that charmed the eyes and ears of every-body except the inhabitants of the farm. Let us look in upon them now sitting in the large old kitchen, as the day draws to its close.

The tall, handsome woman, with the white net cap and grey gown, you can see is the mistress of

the house. She is fidgeting her fingers because it is too dark for her to work any longer, though she has been busy all day, for to sit idle is neither rest nor enjoyment to Kate Bradford. The man with the dreamy face and the yellow curly hair like a boy's (though he has passed his fifty summers), who is just now nodding over his pipe, is John Bradford—not the master of the house, but only the mistress's husband. And now for the two pretty things sitting side by side on the window seat, straining their eyes over a musty old book. Which is the elder of the two? Esty, the fairhaired one with the dark grey eyes, and a face which looks all the paler beside that of Kitty, who is like "a red red rose," has rippling hair the colour of a new-podded chestnut, with big brown eyes, and a figure that makes her the very queen of rustic beauties.

"Come, come, girl's," says the mother, "do put away that book, or to-morrow you'll have eyes like ferrets. Much better you was out breathing the fresh air than cramming your heads with such nonsense."

"Oh, mother! why, it's a lovely story. Only read it," exclaims soft-voiced Esther.

"Read it, indeed! not I. I had enough of your lovely stories in that "Romance of the Forest,"

which your father was always talking about; and such a pack of trash for anybody to waste their precious time writing and reading!"

"What's that about me and my favourite book?" asks John, rousing himself. "Well, I can remember the fancy I took to that book—it made me want the girls to read it, for I was about their age when it turned my head."

"Oh, well, that ain't saying much for it!" retorts Mrs Bradford. "It never takes much to turn an empty thing. But there goes nine o'clock, so be off, all of you; it'll be up ten, now, before you can be in bed," and she bustles off to look and see if the cupboards and safes are locked and bolted. At this John commences to knock out the ashes from his pipe, Esther and Kitty to shut up their book, and reluctantly betake themselves to their little room.

John Bradford was half farmer, half miller. He was not obliged to work hard, nor had he any great anxiety about crops, his wife's father having left a goodish bit of money when he died, more, in fact, than people gave the old miser credit for having. Then they had but the two girls, Esther and Kitty, whom they had sent to the neighbouring town to school, where they were kept until Esther was

eighteen. Now they had been home a year, and Kate Bradford sometimes asked herself if she had been quite wise in keeping her girls away from home so long. Kitty seemed disposed to take to country life and to try to fascinate the best-looking of the young farmers round about; but with Esther it was quite different.

"The child don't give herself airs, or I'd soon take 'em out of her, but she's like a fish out of water amongst our folk. However, I'm determined one of the two shall marry Randal Carey. I lost his father for myself, but the son shan't slip through my fingers easily." So thought Mrs Bradford to herself; and, with these views in her mind, her consent had been easily obtained for the girls going next day to a picnic, returning by Crayshaws, old Mrs Carey's house, and staying there for tea and a dance.

The sun had scarce risen next morning, when two eager faces were anxiously looking to see if the day would be fine. Yes; there was not a cloud visible.

"Oh, Esty, it is going to be lovely; we *shall* enjoy ourselves. I'm so glad, ain't you?"

"Yes—very," answers Esty.

"Then why on earth don't you show it, as I

do!" And she catches hold of Esty and whirls her round.

"Kitty, how absurd you are; *I* know the reason you are so glad—because you will meet Randal Carey; but I—there will be nobody there I shall care for."

"Yes, perhaps there will; for Randal has let the Erme fishing again to the gentleman who had it two years ago. He stops at the 'Roebuck,' and I dare say he will be there. Randal says he is not good-looking, but a very nice gentleman, and he'll be better than nobody."

At eleven o'clock, Esty and Kitty, in their fresh pretty muslins and white straw hats, are carefully settled in the light spring cart by their mother, while their father stands in the doorways and sings, "How happy could I be with either!" Phœbe and Ann, the two maids, look with eyes of longing admiration; the dogs run round and round, barking and jumping at the nose of Mischief, the old pony, who, suddenly waking up to the general excitement, feels it incumbent upon him to try and start off, obliging Seth to jump up. So away they go, the girls kissing their hands, and nodding their pretty heads, to the group of admirers they leave behind.

"Well, I'm glad they're off," says Mrs Bradford,

with a sigh of relief; "it's been warm work getting them ready; and as for that Kitty, she's as vain as a peacock."

"And no wonder," replies the father. "Why, there isn't a prettier maid than our Kitty in all Devonshire. I've heard great talk about the Plymouth girls, but I never see one there to touch her."

"Oh, 'every cook praises his own stew.' I daresay if you asked old Tucker, he'd say he never see a girl like his Hephzibah."

"Well," laughs John, "he'd be pretty right there, for her squint is most *uncommon*."

Mrs Bradford, feeling John has been sharper than usual, wishes to know if he intends standing there all day, hurries Phœbe one way, Ann the other, and very soon is deep in the mysteries of the dairy. Then she will look after chickens and ducks, see to fruit for market and fruit for preserving, and how much butter she can spare. Such duties, with household arrangements and needlework, occupy her until day closes again.

John has gone to bed, ten o'clock has struck, and she sits in the kitchen alone, listening for the wheels to tell her that the girls have returned. The front door is set open, but not a sound enters.

Nothing breaks the stillness, save the loud tick of the old eight-day clock. Most women, tired after the busy day, would have sat drowsily unoccupied. But not so Kate Bradford. The stocking she is darning certainly progresses more slowly than it might have done in the morning, but this is only because she is allowing her thoughts to run riot.

At length the sound of wheels, and girlish voices, and subdued laughter, tell her that Esty and Kitty are at the door.

"Oh, mother," they both cry out.

"Hush, hush, now," whispers the mother; "don't make a noise, and wake everybody up. Stand to Mischief's head, Kitty, while Seth comes in to get his pasty and jug of cider, and then there'll be no call for opening doors again."

Kitty obeys, and soon they are telling their mother, in subdued whispers, how they have enjoyed the day, how they had dinner in the woods, and then walked back to Crayshaws to tea.

"We had such lots of partners," Kitty says: "everybody asked us to dance; and, mother, what do you think? Esty has such a grand admirer. Guess who it is!"

The mother looks quickly from one to the other, and can't tell at all. Esty blushes her deepest

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shell-pink, and tells Kitty not to be silly. Kitty laughs, and points to the tell-tale colour, while she says—

“Why, the gentleman from London, who has the Erme fishing, Mr Arthur Vane. He danced with her three times, and walked from the woods with her, though both the Miss Rickets, the Rector’s daughters, were there.”

“Well, and who paid you attention?”

“Me—oh, everybody; first one, and then the other.”

“But who did Randal dance with?”

“Why, mother,” cried Esty, “with Kitty, to be sure; he is always talking to her and laughing with her. He never finds anything to say to me. I don’t think he spoke twenty words during our quadrille, for he was watching Mr Vane and Kitty.”

“Well, well,” says Mrs Bradford, with radiant face, “so long as both are pleased I’m content. Now don’t lie talking half the night, but get up early like good girls, for I want you both to-morrow to help with the raspberries.”

While this conversation is taking place at Tretthill, Randal Carey, having seen the last of his guests depart, is sitting thinking. His hands are

thrust into his pockets, and his face wears a most discontented expression.

"I can see that Mr Vane is struck with her," Randal says to himself; "he did nothing but talk to her the whole day, and I can't think whatever it is makes me feel such a fool when I am near that girl. During the quadrille I mustered up courage to ask her to keep for me, I don't think that we got through a dozen words, and I only managed to tear her frock, making her think me a greater lout than I am. I can find enough to say to Kitty, but not to her. If we are alone, I wonder if I am doing the right thing; the time passes, and at the end I have said nothing, and even done what I didn't mean to."

Randal was a fine young fellow of four-and-twenty, his fair face tanned into a brown that nearly matched his curly hair. If the face were really index to the heart, you would have judged Randal very truly. He was not particularly quick nor clever, but nature had formed him a gentleman of the old type—one who "loved his neighbour, feared God, and honoured the king." What a contrast to him was the man to whom he had just said "Good night"—who had been everywhere, seen and done everything, and was ready to avow that "there was nothing in it!"

Nature had formed Arthur Vane particularly quick and clever, but the world made him a gentleman after its own fashion, who sneered at his neighbour (unless the neighbour provided money or amusement), who believed that God was only to be thought of and feared by women and sick people, who honoured nobody and nothing, and yet was not what is termed a bad man. On the contrary, people by general consent admired him. Even now our little Esty, instead of courting sleep, though her fair face rests upon the pillow, is setting Arthur Vane upon a pedestal in her heart, and will shortly fall down and worship him after the manner of her sex.

But he is not thinking one bit about her as he walks to his inn in the moonlight, puffing his cigar. No. His thoughts rather turn to Kitty, and run somewhat after this fashion—

“By Jove, I haven’t seen anything so bewitching as that little Kitty Somebody for a month of Sundays. Now, that’s a face and figure after my own heart, always reminding one of life and sunshine. I wonder what made me so extremely virtuous as to resolve to keep out of her way, and not interfere with the claims of that interesting bumpkin who was honouring her with his bovine attentions. The sister is a pretty little thing, too. I believe the

child thought I was smitten by her. She shows off Miss Kitty to perfection. I'll get Carey to go that way to-morrow—she told me their farm was not far from the Erme meadows—and then I think I'll 'improve the shining hour.' We never know until we try what may suit us, and evidently self-denial does not agree with me; so my advice is '*Bon homme garde ta vache.*'"

II.

NEXT day, as the sun was losing its power, Arthur Vane and Randal Carey crossed Warleigh Woods, and came upon what each man thought about the prettiest picture he had ever seen. Under the shade of the big walnut-tree, in her grey gown, starched white apron, and net cap, sat handsome Mrs Bradford, busy working. On the ground, with an immense yellow bowl of raspberries between them, sat Esty and Kitty, their spotless print dresses guarded by large white Holland aprons, their pretty fingers all stained red by the fruit, which sent forth its delicious odour that no sense might remain ungratified. No sooner did they see their visitors than both their faces were as red as their fingertips. They did not mind Randal so much, but that

the gentleman from London should see them thus! and they burst into laughter as the momentary vexation was driven away in the fun of being so caught. Arthur was the first to speak, and soon put them all at their ease. He had to be introduced to Mrs Bradford, and in five minutes he conveyed to her mind that to be introduced to her was the sole object of his visit. Kitty had insisted on Randal helping them to stem the raspberries, and Esty, though she did not look up, saw only Arthur Vane, heard only his voice. He must have made Randal come, indeed she heard Randal say as much to Kitty; but why did he want to come? It must have been—and here her heart beat so loud that she feared they would hear it, and she bent over the fruit that the joy might not be read in her tell-tale blushes.

Arthur, in the mean time, is making a discovery which piques him considerably, for he sees that Miss Kitty is not at all averse to Randal's attentions, and that as long as she can secure these attentions he may devote himself to her mother, or to Esty, or to whom he pleases. "Well," he thinks, "I generally contrive to win my way, and it will be odd if I owe my first defeat to two members of this rustic community. So, my charming Kitty, I

shall continue to pay my most devoted attentions to your pale sister, and after she has sounded my praises in your ears, you will be all the more ready to appreciate my sudden surrender to your charms." There upon Esty hears a soft voice asking if she will not allow herself to be helped, and, in imagination, Mrs Bradford has soon married both her daughters, and is debating in her own mind where Esty is to find a house to suit her near-by. Then she insists that they must stop to tea, and hurries off to get out the best china, to set forth all her delicacies, and to tell John to make himself fit to be seen.

When they all go under the tree again, John makes signs to Mrs Bradford to come and sit with him in the porch, and leave the young people to themselves for a time; but she will not understand, and the young men are obliged to take their leave without getting anything but a promise of a ramble in the woods.

As soon as John and his wife are alone, he says, "Why, mother, I do believe our little Esty's got a sweetheart at last; and as for that Kitty, it's easy to see that Randal has neither eyes nor ears for anybody but her. Well, well! you know, Kate, I cut out his father, and so I'll make it up to the

son by giving him my daughter. I seem to grow a boy again when I look at those two young chaps. They were both longing for a bit of a chat alone with the girls. Why didn't you leave them and come and sit by me?"

"Not I, indeed," says Mrs Bradford. "Better to leave longing than loathing. I'm not going to make my girls cheap to anybody."

This day's ramble in the woods decided poor Esty's fate, and much disgusted Miss Kitty, who had quite made up her mind that when she and Randal were alone he would no longer spar and laugh, but become earnest and tender, while she—why, she would be cold and indifferent, and pretend she had never had an idea he meant them to be anything but friends. So she would drive him to despair, and then before they parted she would become shyly coy, and give him just enough hope to keep him in a fever until they met again. But instead of all this, he tried to keep close to Esty and Mr Vane, and when, at length, through her stopping for some ferns, they did lose the couple, Randal was moodily silent, and walked by her side, switching off the heads of all the flowers, until she could have cried with vexation and wounded vanity. Indeed, she was only too glad to say "Good-night"

at the stile. Arthur noted the pouting expression, and was fain to think that Corydon and Philida had had a quarrel; for although under other circumstances it would have been very pleasant to have received such homage and worship as he read in Esty's soft eyes, still when he wanted the eagle the dove bored him.

He had divined rightly, that he should lose nothing in Esty's mouth; for now, as she sits brushing her golden hair, she repeats to Kitty all her hero's wonderful merits.

"And do you know," she says, "he can sing and play the piano and the guitar, and can speak French and Italian, and is so clever? But, for all that, I do not believe he is happy; he speaks as if he had no one to care for him."

"Perhaps he's been crossed in love," says Kitty, who is allowing Esty to have an unusual share of conversation just now.

"Oh, Kitty, impossible!"

"I don't see it's at all impossible. He is not good-looking! and he's much older than Randal."

"Not good-looking! why, Kitty, you surely have no taste. His eyes are lovely."

"They may be, but they're poked into his head so far you can't see them."

"Why, that gives them all their expression; and then he has such a good nose, and his moustache."

"Oh, yes, I dare say he is perfection; but then as I'm not in love with him, and you are, you must not expect me to appreciate him quite so much."

"Kitty, you shouldn't say that; it isn't nice."

"Why not? I am sure he is dreadfully in love with you. Randal does nothing but ask if you don't care for him." Before these words are fairly out, Esty has thrown her arms round her sister's neck, and Kitty says, "Why, I do believe you are crying," and Esty answers with a little sob, "No, I am not, only—only—if he really does care for me—oh, Kitty!"

The moon peeps through the diamond panes to look upon this pretty scene, and throws her soft light on Randal and Arthur as they stand at Crayshaw gate. Arthur is in the highest possible spirits, for he has been sounding Randal about Kitty, and during the conversation, without seeming unduly interested, has found out that the love lies on Miss Kitty's side, and also—although Randal thinks he has most artfully guarded his secret—that Esty has a devoted lover of whom she wots not.

"Well, Carey," says Arthur, "you know it's

hardly fair to Miss Kitty, to pay her so much attention if you mean nothing."

"Indeed," replies Randal, "you're mistaken, for beyond laughing and talking she never gave me a thought. I don't know how it is, we always seem to be thrown together; but if it causes remarks, I'll manage to keep out of the way after this."

"There you're wrong," answers Arthur; "I should break off the thing by degrees; it always makes it awkward for a girl when a man suddenly leaves off paying the attention he has been accustomed to show her. I should go there just the same as ever, but I should manage to pay less court to Miss Kitty, and more to her sister."

"What! *you* advise me to pay attention to Esty; I shouldn't get a chance while *you* were by."

"*I!* why, I talk to her simply because I thought you wanted the fair Kitty all to yourself. Both are equally charming to me; but the poor little thing complained that you never cared to speak to her, and had no eyes for any one when her pretty sister was near."

"Esty said so!" cries Randal; "she spoke about me!"

"Yes," returns Arthur. "Perhaps it is not quite right in me, but I fear your good looks have been

too much for both the sisters, and one is allowing concealment to "prey upon her damask cheek." Now do you see the value of my attentions?"

"Oh, Mr Vane," Randal exclaims, forgetting all his caution in his joy, "I am so much obliged! you don't know what a kindness you have done me. I don't mind telling you now, that I am awfully in love with Esty Bradford; but I could never show her what I felt because somehow she seemed so much above me. If she were only here now, I—I—could say anything."

"Well," laughs Arthur, "since I have been a friend to you, take my advice. Don't be too rash, or the girl will naturally think you and her sister have had a quarrel. Let matters go on as they are at present, and you will see how soon all will run in the right groove."

So, as the summer days went by, Kitty chafed under Randal's changed manner, while gentle Esty, seeing all was not going on smoothly, became more talkative to Randal, sending Arthur to amuse Kitty. Randal found his awkwardness vanish before Esty's unconscious familiarity; and Arthur, partly through Kitty's charms, and partly because no girl before had ever remained so long indifferent to him, was unreasonably and completely consumed by a passion

which he called love. "By Jove," he would say to himself, "I must put an end to this; it's too bad to that poor child. She must be awfully far gone. When I see her colour coming and going, and her loving eyes shyly looking up to mine, for my life I can't help lowering my voice and looking back again; and then, when I feel her little hand trembling, I press it even while I am making up my mind I won't do so. Oh, Kitty! you have a great deal to answer for. It wouldn't considerably surprise me if some fine evening I made a fool of myself, for I believe I have four times packed up my traps in the morning and unpacked them in the evening, and no man can stand that wear and tear long."

So, with the view of carrying out his virtuous intentions the next evening they meet, Arthur pays so little heed to Esty, that she thinks she must have offended him. Her heart feels very sore when, after he and Kitty have teased, and quarrelled, and laughed, they finally ramble off together, leaving her with Randal. Fancying he is sorry for her, she is very kind and gentle to him, only disturbing his happiness by saying that she must go home, as her head aches so badly she can hardly talk. Then he bids her not speak again; and, as she leans upon his arm, he helps her through the tangled briar and

brush-wood, silently praying that he may be her "staff to stay," and she his "star to guide," through all their life to come.

Mrs Bradford is duly anxious about her daughter, and Esty kisses her mother, and tells her that she is not very bad, only she knows she shall not be better until she gets sleep, and she will go to bed as quickly and quietly as possible. And then Randal sits beneath the tree by Mrs Bradford, under pretence of waiting for Arthur, but really because he can see the diamond-paned window of Esty's room.

Now, from certain signs she had lately seen, sharp-sighted Mrs Bradford had felt a little uneasy, fearing that they were all playing a game of cross purposes. But this evening Randal's anxiety and looks of tender compassion have openly shown his feelings, and she begins to think that if she doesn't set her wits to work her scheme will be upset when it appears nearest completion. So, when Kitty has returned, and they are left alone, she begins—

"Why, Kitty, what's made you and Randal so chuff to each other lately? How was it you and Mr Vane walked together? You've been showing off your airs to Randal, and he won't put up with it."

"I'm sure, mother," answers Kitty, with a toss of her head, "I don't want him to put up with my airs, as you call them; I don't value his attentions."

"Oh, I dare say not," replies Mrs Bradford, quickly. "The cow didn't know the value of her tail till she'd lost it; but perhaps when I tell you that he's quite given you up for your sister you'll wish you hadn't been quite so high and mighty."

"Dear me!" says Kitty quite scornfully, but with a sharp thorn of jealousy at her heart. "This is really too good; for Esty's lover is only waiting for me to hold up my finger, and he will come after me anywhere: and as she doesn't mind taking other people's orts, I don't see why I need be above following her example," and as she said this, she thought bitterly, "I'll not be pitied by Randal. He must have seen I cared for him, and all the while he has been liking Esty. I understand it all now, and I hate him." Therefore, quite regardless of Esty, she resolves that Arthur shall propose to her, and that she will accept him, rather than let Randal suppose that she is breaking her heart about him.

Mrs Bradford was in the habit of deciding most things for her family, and by the next morning had

made up her mind that Esty must go and spend a week with Aunt Matilda. Just then, the less she saw of Mr Vane the better; and by the time she returned, if he intended anything by Kitty, they would have settled matters, or he might go away as he had said he should do two or three times lately. Any way, he would most likely be disposed of, and the field left open to Randal.

"Things in this world," she thought, "always turn as crooked as a ram's horn; else why couldn't Randal take to Kitty? She's just the wife for him; and then Esty, I can see, has set her heart on Mr Vane. Poor little thing! I'm sure she should have him if I could have things as I want them. But there," she continued, as conscience began to give her little pricks, "I am doing all for her good, and Esty's easily turned; so she won't hold out against anybody long."

It was therefore made known to every one that unless Esty immediately went to spend a week with Aunt Matilda, neither of the girls would ever be a farthing the better for the money she had to leave. Now, Aunt Matilda might drop off at any time, and what would folks say if her own sister's children couldn't spare a few days to go and see her now and then? Esty was the favourite, and Esty must

go first; and when she came back, Kitty should go. Esty showed more resistance to her mother than she had ever done before; and then when she found she must go, she pleaded hard to be allowed to stay till the next day; but it was all to no purpose. Mischief was wanted then to take father to Modbury; and eleven o'clock found Esty some five miles on her way towards Aunt Matilda's house. She could indulge her own thoughts, for Seth's conversation was purely laconic. He seldom spoke except to enlighten Esty with such remarks as "Her's a heifer," "There's a bull," and then he would relapse into silence.

Poor Esty! how grey everything looked to her! All the rose colour which had lately seemed to flood her young life had suddenly vanished—Arthur to be so altered all at once as never to look at her! She must have offended him, and now a whole week must pass, and she shouldn't know the cause. Perhaps that very day he would be sorry, and come to make it up, and find her gone. Oh, what could she do? Then there was Kitty quite cool and silent, and when she had asked what was the matter—had she vexed her in anything? she got for reply, that nothing was the matter; how could Esty vex *her*? But then Kitty was often put out,

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and that was nothing to Arthur. Suppose he should think that she was angry, and had meant to leave without seeing him, and that he should go back to London! At this thought she clasps her little hands tightly together to still the feeling that impels her to jump out and run all the way to the "Roebuck" and implore Arthur to forgive her.

Mrs Bradford had made a great mistake when she sent Esty to Aunt Matilda's that she might see less of him. Had that been her only scheme, assuredly it would have failed, for in the dull house, with no one but her ailing aunt to speak to, the girl's whole thoughts were given up to him. Every one of his merits was magnified a hundred times by absence. If she walked out she sighed that he was not by her side. If she sat silent, she wondered where he was. I doubt if ever such earnest prayers had been offered for his happiness and protection as Esty sent up.

So at the end of the week Esty returned home, her heart filled with "that bliss beyond all that the minstrel hath told." She was received by her mother and sister, who told her how much they had missed her, and how glad they were to see her; but no word was spoken of Randal or Arthur.

It is evening, and Esty, after she has unpacked

her things and put them away in her drawers, begins to wonder why Kitty has not come up to her, for then she will hear all the news. She resolves to go down and find her, but first she readjusts her dress and hair, casting many a lingering look in the glass, for it is the time that Arthur generally comes, and he and Randal may walk over. She looks into the big kitchen, but there is no Kitty there, nor is she under the walnut-tree, nor anywhere about. She may be in the parlour, so Esty goes up the three low stairs, and along the little passage, and down another step into the best room—a room made but little use of at Trethill, and always reminding the inmates of good prosy books and somewhat dull Sunday afternoons. Esty is rather surprised to see in it so many signs of recent occupation. Kitty's work is lying there, as well as some half-wound wool and a book left open. But she cannot give more than a passing thought, for every beat of her heart seems to say, "Will he come? will he come?" and she seats herself on the old-fashioned window-seat, where she can just catch a glimpse of the pathway leading to the wooden stile. In five minutes the anxious question is changed into a pæan, for two figures cross the wood-path, and Esty's face is covered

with a soft rosy colour that joy will hardly let die out again. She waits for a minute, and then runs to the door and listens. It is only Randal's voice, for Arthur has gone round by the garden; he wants to meet her alone. Oh, she is so glad to see him again! Now she does not feel one bit shy; she will tell him how sorry she was to go, and that she has done nothing but think of him, and that—yes, there he comes; he opens the gate so softly, and then it swings-to with a click as he impatiently strides forward. But to what?—to whom? To Kitty, who comes out of the little bower radiant with smiles, and on whose rosy face—while she feigns to push him away—Arthur prints a dozen kisses. Then he puts his arm round her, and they slowly go back to the little bower, while Randal, coming to seek Esty with his heart overflowing with a love he can no longer keep from her, sees the white face pressed against the window, its eyes dilated, and every feature sharpened by the torture she endures from what she has seen. He sees her slip from her seat, and hide her head in the cushions as she sobs out, “Oh, my heart will break.”

Then the truth dawns upon Randal, and with it a vague suspicion that Arthur has lied to him. His great unselfish love swallows up disappointment,

and leaves only bitter agony that he can give no comfort to his darling, to secure whose happiness then he would willingly give up every hope of his own; but he is powerless, and has to go softly away and say he thinks Esty is out of doors, as he cannot find her. Perhaps she is in the wood, and he will go and look for her there.

III.

Two months have not cooled Arthur's passion for Kitty. He is more in love than he ever was before, and when he thinks of his mother's allowance to him of £ 200 a year being withdrawn, he consoles himself with the thought that Kitty has not been brought up a fine lady with a hundred wants. They must live abroad for a time, and then return to London and take lodgings somewhere. Kitty won't know whether the place is fashionable or not. Of course, he must keep up his club and show himself there, and some day he may pick up an appointment.

Kitty is supremely happy. As a lover Arthur is all that any girl could wish; and she is delighted, too, at the prospect of going abroad, and living in London. But a shadow has fallen between her and

Esty. The girls no longer feel at ease when left alone.

Mrs Bradford doesn't "know what has come to the child." But when she notices Esty's weary step and heavy eyes, or comes upon her unawares, as she sits with her hands supporting her chin, and her eyes gazing into vacancy, her heart is stung. Then Kitty complains that Esty disturbs her by moaning in her sleep, and so now they have separate rooms. Esty is always tired, and cannot be induced to ramble in the woods, though Randal often comes to ask her. But she is very sweet and gentle to him, thinking that in losing Kitty he has suffered too, and that this makes him silent and low-spirited.

Poor Randal! These are truly weary days for him. When he looks at Esty and thinks of the great sorrow that lies heavy at her heart, he feels as if he could take her in his arms, that in the love and pity he feels towards her she might find rest and peace. There is but one hope for him. Perhaps when Kitty is married, and they are both gone, Esty may in time come to think less about Arthur, and bring herself to like him a little.

Esty's great trial draws nigh—the day that will forbid her to think of Arthur more. It is now the

night before the wedding, and the sorrow which up till this time has lain dull and heavy now blazes forth, phoenix-like. The poor little head droops low, as between her sobs she prays that she may be able to wish happiness to Kitty, her dear sister, who is so pretty that it is no wonder she made Arthur love her. But, oh, had it only been any one but Kitty, she could have borne it better. Then she need never have seen him again—she would not have felt so oppressed, so overwhelmed with wickedness and shame. She cannot drive the man who is to be her sister's husband from her heart. But to-morrow she shall see them married, and after that she will never think of him again.

All the day of the wedding Esty seems to herself as one in a dream. When she stands by Kitty's side she is surprised how little of the agony she has so much dreaded possesses her heart. Her thoughts wander off to things she has never heeded before. She wonders who has planted the ivy, a spray of which comes in at the window? Whether Roger Consandine and Audrey his wife were like those two small fat figures kneeling opposite each other.

Kitty would have liked a gay wedding, but Arthur had told her that he could never stand relations,

and impressed upon her the delight he would feel in having nobody to interfere with their happiness on that day; and as the church was half way to the station, it would be best to leave without returning to Trethill.

Mrs Bradford at first opposed this violently. But Arthur generally contrived to get his own way, and it was decided according to his wishes. So about half an hour after the wedding, Mr and Mrs Bradford, Randal, and Esty are standing at the little station, waiting for the up train which will take Kitty away. Amid the confusion and the stir of "good-byes," Mrs Bradford tries hard to keep in the tears, while they roll down John's cheeks, and Esty looks pale and white. But the whistle shrieks, and she and Kitty kiss each other. Randal catches quick hold of Esty, for the train is in motion; another moment, and the newly-wedded pair are gone.

IV.

MR and Mrs Bradford, Randal, and Esty silently return to the old farm. Mrs Bradford says, "Talk about weddings! there's only a pin to choose between them and funerals." John takes Esty beside him,

and tells her that she must bide at home with father and mother for a good bit yet; and Esty protests she has no thought of leaving. Nor has she. When she thinks of herself now, it is without hope for the future. She tries to be cheerful, but joy will not come without an effort. When she goes to church she looks at Miss Cordelia, the Squire's sister, who, her mother says, was a great beauty, only she has had a disappointment. Now she is a sharp-faced, cross old lady, the terror of children and young house-wives. She wonders if she will ever come to that, and a little shudder steals over her.

She will go on thus quietly existing for some weeks, when some morning a letter comes from the bride with, "We are at Vevay," and "How I wish you were at Interlaken!" and at this the restless feeling comes back again.

The snow is on the ground, yet Randal crosses Warleigh Woods as frequently as when he had to hold back the wild roses, and pick his way through celandine, wood-sorrel, and veronica. He has confided his trouble to Mrs Bradford, and she has promised to sound Esty on her feelings towards him. The matron knows she has undertaken a task requiring much tact and diplomacy; and though she

always tells Randal to have patience, that "no oak was ever felled with one stroke," yet she is not at all so sure of turning Esty round as in days gone by.

"Why, Esty," she begins, as they sit together in the old kitchen, "you've been looking at that coal for more than five minutes. What are you thinking of, child?"

"Me? Oh, nothing, mother."

"Thinking of nothing is poor work," says the mother. "*I* was thinking of our Kitty. I don't like her feeling so fretty in that outlandish place."

"But she is in Brussels now, mother, and if she does not feel stronger, they will come back, I should think, as Kitty seems to long for home; yet she must have enjoyed all she has seen. How I should like to see Switzerland!"

"Well," answers her mother, "I dare say you will see it some of these days."

Here Esty gives a little deprecatory smile, and her mother continues, "When you get married you must go to all the places Kitty has been to. I know somebody who would be only too proud and pleased to take you."

"Pleased to take me, mother! whom do you mean?"

"Well, Esty, my dear, they say "love is blind," and sometimes people are blind to love, else you'd see that Randal is getting thin and pale, all because you don't seem to understand what he is always coming here for."

"Understand, mother! why, what can you mean?" says Esty, with a scared look. "I know that Randal has never been the same since Kitty left us; he often hints at the pain he has suffered, poor fellow."

"Yes, Esty, but everybody but you knows who is the cause of his pain. Now, now let me speak out—Randal always loved you, only he thought that you were so above him, that when he came near you he seemed as if struck dumb. Arthur Vane was the first who advised him to pluck up courage, and wait his time, and in the end he would win you. Nay, child don't cry so; I can tell your feeling; you think you never want to be married. But, Esty, I cannot bear to think of you, when father and me are gone—lonely—old—perhaps unloved. "The sweetest wine makes the sharpest vinegar," and many a crabbed old maid was once as sweet and young as yourself. And Randal is a man to be proud of—so kind and gentle, even hiding his love for fear it should pain you. So,

for father's sake and for mine, think over what I have said; and if you feel that he is not quite your choice, yet think what happiness you will give to us all."

At this Esty hides her face in her mother's lap, saying, "Oh, mother! mother! To make you and father happy I will do anything you wish."

V.

THE June sun is again declining on the old farmhouse at Trethill, lighting up the patches of yellow moss on the roof, glancing along the diamond panes in the old-fashioned windows, slanting through the leaves on the big walnut-tree, and lingering fondly and softly on the very same group which two years ago had charmed the eyes of Randal Carey and Arthur Vane. There is Mrs Bradford, handsome as then, but with many a silver streak in her dark hair, and lines about her mouth and eyes that we should not have seen before. Her knitting lies idly on her lap, and her eyes are closed as if to keep from view some sight which pains them. On the ground sits pale-faced Esty, her hair every now and again turning to brightest gold as it catches the sun's warm rays, for she

bends over a reclining figure, and sways gently to and fro, fanning—Kitty? But, no!—surely that face with the big, wistful eyes and hectic flush can never be that of Kitty Bradford? Ah! but it is, although Katherine Vane is a very different person from our vain, self-loving, warm-hearted Kitty, who had, as Arthur said, “a face and figure after his own heart, and which would always remind him of life and sunshine.” What had life, what had sunshine to do with the frail creature who seems but kept from the grasp of the “dread monarch” by the loving hands which will not let her go from them? Kitty has come home to die; but the hardest thing of all is this—that Kitty can say, life has been harder than death could be. For the first three months after marriage she had been Arthur’s toy, his pet, his pleasure; but soon she had to battle against neglect, jealousy, and wrong, until at length a time came when she succumbed, and only begged to be sent back to her mother and Esty. As her husband had been asked to make one of a fishing party to Norway, he gave his consent. Now the only fear in the hearts of Mrs Bradford and Esty is, that Arthur and Kitty will never see each other again in this world.

“Hark,” says the faint voice, “I hear Randal

coming across the footpath;" and then, with her old smile to Esty, "you ought to hear his step first; love should be blind, but not deaf." And Randal comes behind Esty, and bends over to show the tempting strawberries he has brought.

"How good you are to me!" says Kitty; "what should we do without him, Esty?"

Esty's little hand at this slides into Randal's, her face upturned to his, full of contented love. They were to have been married some time ago, but Kitty cannot spare her sister, and they know that she will not hinder them long.

As soon as she can do so, Esty joins Randal, to be told by him that Arthur has sent a telegram, saying that he is on his road to Trethill. Then Kitty has to be carried into the house, and the news gently broken to her.

* * * *

Arthur would sacrifice all to save her now, but Kitty is content to die, knowing that could a miracle raise her to health, six months hence the same old scenes would be enacted over again.

* * * *

A new year has come, and on the first Sunday in it, Esty Carey leaves her husband's arm to put her hand into her mother's; for they stand before

a little cross with this inscription, "Sacred to the memory of Katherine, the beloved wife of Arthur Vane, Esq., and daughter of John Bradford, of Tret-hill in this county," and underneath are the words, "It is better, if the will of God be so."

Esty points to the text, and says, "We can say so, mother, can we not?"

And Randal, taking the dear hand in his, thanks God that He has given such a treasure into his keeping.

"Come, mother," says John, "you know you always say it's folly fretting where grief's no comfort; let us turn homeward, thankful that for both our children our hearts are at peace. While we live our Esty will be the pride and joy of her old father and mother; and when we go hence, our Kitty with outstretched arms will welcome us there."

"A WILL OF HER OWN."

"HURRAH! hurrah! Good news, mother. George has won; he made a capital speech, and everybody says he'll make his fortune at the Bar. Mr Luxmore is a jolly old fellow, and is pleased with George, and no mistake; here he comes."

And the speaker, Jack Esdaile, rushes to open the door and precede his brother, blowing an imaginary trumpet solo of "See the Conquering Hero comes." Mrs Esdaile's sweet face lights up; and, as George enters the room, she goes quickly up to him, puts her arms round him, and says softly—

"My boy;" then, looking into his face, while her eyes are dimmed with happy tears, says, "How proud your dear father will be!"

"And you—are you not proud of me, mother?"

"I, George?"

Her son wants no other answer, and, stooping to kiss her, feels more than repaid for weary nights of study and days full of thought and anxiety.

For this success was more to George Esdaile than it would have been to most young men entering on life. George could remember when his father was a merchant with no cares or fears, everything seemed so prosperous. Their old-fashioned country house with its big garden, where, when he came from Rugby, he spent such delightful holidays, still seemed home to him. He could recall the bank failure, and the harassing year that followed, when his father was so wretched and gloomy, and his mother never before so cheerful and sweet; and then the crash, and the dreadful time that followed, when Robert Esdaile found himself penniless with a wife and five boys to provide for. Ah! they had known many trials since then, trials which must have only been blessings in disguise, since each one left the husband and wife dearer to each other, and showed them fresh traits in their boys' characters to be proud of, and gave them renewed love and sympathy for all in sickness or sorrow.

It is ten years since their worldly wealth took wing. Robert Esdaile is now a City clerk, delighted

"How it all happened," etc. I.

when he gets a rise of £10 a year to his salary. All the boys, except Jack, are started in the world. Dick is in a merchant's office at Liverpool, and doing well; Hal *would* be a sailor, and writes delightful letters from Hong Kong; Fred is in the India House; and George, who had been taken by Mr Luxmore, the family solicitor, and given his articles, had always sighed for the Bar and is now "called." His kind old friend who had assisted him, and given him his first brief, is now chuckling with delight that he should have introduced such a promising young fellow. So this has been a very fortunate year for the Esdailes, and Fortune seems to be smiling upon them again. Yet, in spite of all this, father, mother, and boys all declare that it is the dullest year they have ever spent; the sunbeam of the house has gone, and all agree with Jack, that "things ain't a bit the same without Nell."

But who is Nell, and why is she not there, and where is she gone? Well, in years past, had you asked one of the Esdaile boys who Nell was, they would have told you that she was their sister. But lately somehow they had always said to such a question, "Miss Hall, who is just like a daughter to our mother." And that was true, for from Mrs Esdaile, or auntie, as Nelly called her, the girl had

all a mother's love, and that love was now going through a sharp trial. Mrs Esdaile and Nelly's mother had been playfellows, schoolfellows, and ever after dear friends. Against the wish of her family, Eleanor Davidson had married Captain Hall. He had fallen in the Crimean war, and his wife had ceased to regret that she was following him so fast after Mrs Esdaile had promised to bring up Nelly as her own child. "She shall never forget you, Eleanor; but she shall never feel the want of your love, if I can help it." This promise was made when the Esdailes had money and position. But when the promise had to be fulfilled, Nelly was received into a family where when one meal was finished they often knew not how the next would be provided. Nelly was ten years old when her mother died, just old enough, poor child, to realise her great loss and to appreciate the reception she met with from Mrs Esdaile, who took her in her arms while the little one proclaimed the tie that bound them:—"You loved mamma; you loved mamma." Tears and caresses soothed her, the boys devoted themselves to her entirely, and Mr Esdaile often said she had been sent to them to take their minds off their own troubles, "and to show me,

my dear, not to despond while I have you and the boys left."

So Mrs Esdaile darned and mended for Nelly and the boys; and one taught Nelly this, and the other taught her that, until times got better and she could be put to school. Then little sacrifices were made that Nelly might have all the advantages they could obtain for her; and she repaid them by growing up the prettiest, and sweetest, and most loving girl in the whole neighbourhood. Jack declared that the whole of his form at school were in love with her, and that since she had been seen with Fred two or three times, several swells from his office had done nothing but walk up and down their street.

"Well, you needn't snap a fellow up like that, George," said Fred to one of George's serious rebukes, "for I should like to know who you think Robert Luxmore comes here to see. Not you, I'm certain."

George knew that well enough, as well as he knew that pretty Nelly had taken all his love, and that, unless she could love him in return, life would be very dreary to him. Lately it had entered his mind that she cared more for Fred; she would propose to walk out with him, and put her arm round

his neck. Such things she never did to George; and if they did go out, they were nearly silent all the way. She didn't run down and open the door for him now as she once did. Stupid fellow, not to read the signs of the tender passion better than that. Why, Nelly had lost her heart long ago, only the poor little maiden had set her hero up so high, that she thought she must worship him afar off. Of course, George couldn't talk to her when they were alone, she wasn't clever enough for that. So she carries off some numbers of the *Solicitor's Journal*, and tries to get up a case or two for conversation, but, not being clear in her memory as to which is the plaintiff, and which is the defendant, that scheme fails signally, and Nelly declares to herself that she is more stupid than ever. Every evening at six finds her standing on tip-toe, looking over the blind in her little room, wondering why George does not come, a thousand fears making her foolish little heart beat. But, at last, she sees him coming. Instead, however, of flying to meet him, a sudden shyness comes over Miss Nell; and when she walks into the sitting-room, it is to say, "What, is George home? is it so late? How quickly the time flies!" Afterwards she goes up, and cries to think that he never looked at her, and hardly spoke to her. Mrs

Esdaile, who is as young at heart as either of them, and thoroughly enters into every true love affair, is sometimes quite vexed. For George is his mother's darling, and Nelly is the wife she has chosen for him. She knows all her sons are in love with the child, after a fashion, down to Jack, who often prefaces a speech with, "When you and I are married, Nell." But the mother sees that Nelly has only caught the fancies of the other boys, while George has staked his entire happiness on her Yes or No.

Matters were still in this condition, when one day Mrs Esdaile received a visit from a distant cousin of Nelly's mother. He had just returned from India, and had found that Mrs Hall was dead, and that none of her relatives had considered themselves near enough to feel it their duty to look after her orphan child, who they said had been adopted by a family called Esdaile. The Esdailes were not so well off as in former days, but lately (meaning for ten years or so) they had lost sight of them. Mr Davidson made no secret of his interest in Nelly.

"I loved her mother, Mrs Esdaile; and if the daughter is anything like her, I intend to make her my heiress, and you will spare her, no doubt."

"Spare her!" said Mrs Esdaile. "What do you mean?"

"Mean, madam? Why, that you have a husband and five boys, and I am a childless old man, who hasn't got a wife, and doesn't want one; but he does want the girl to whom he intends to leave his money to live with him, and make him feel a little less friendless in his native land."

Poor Mrs Esdaile! she hardly knew what to do, but she said she would consult her husband and Nelly, and call Nelly in that Mr Davidson might see her. He expressed himself perfectly satisfied with her, and said she was a modest-spoken, well-mannered young lady. And when he was gone, the young lady, who knew nothing of him save that he was a friend of Mrs Esdaile's gave it as her opinion that he was a cross, ill-tempered old Scotchman. Mr and Mrs Esdaile had a long consultation that evening, a consultation in which love and what they considered duty waged very sharp warfare. But at last it was agreed that George should be called in, for by this time a letter had arrived from Mr Davidson, explaining what he intended to do for Miss Eleanor Hall, and making only one very hard condition—that for one year, except in a case of illness, she should neither hear from nor see any of

the Esdaile's. She was then to make her choice; and after that time he hoped they would ever continue on the most friendly terms. Poor George! his heart sank down like lead when he heard what his father had to say, but he only tried to swallow the great knot which rose in his throat, and to get out in a harsh voice—

"Of course, she must go; it would not be fair of us to keep her, or to influence her in any way."

"George," said Mrs Esdaile, "I did not expect you to say such a thing as that; I am sure it would break Nelly's heart to go away from us."

"Well, mother, she need not leave us if she chooses to return in twelve months."

"Chooses, indeed," replied his mother; "I am surprised at your wanting to make out that Nelly is heartless; I thought you would have felt the very idea of her going more than any of us."

"So I do, mother; and perhaps that very feeling urges me to say that—that," and here the speaker's heart rebelled so violently that he suddenly stopped. In a moment his mother's arms were round his neck with as soft caressing as though he had been a child again, and after a minute or two she said—

"Now I shall leave you and papa to settle it

with your heads, and I shall carry your hearts away, not to be returned until you have decided how it is right for us to act."

And when she came back an hour afterwards it was to find George looking very pale, and his father very grave. When they were alone, Mr Esdaile said—

"Mary, my dear, we must thank God that our boy has such a noble heart. My decision has been greatly influenced by his suggestions. Nelly must go, and George will trust that she will decide to return to us. Until then he will trust and hope. He tells me he had determined to get our consent to having his fate decided at once, but under existing circumstances it would neither be fair to Nelly nor to Mr Davidson."

So, some days after, Nelly was told of the offer that had been made to her. The poor girl cried, and sobbed, and declared that she would not go. Then she flung herself into Mrs Esdaile's arms, and asked her if she could part with her—if she could break her heart? And, with many tears, Mrs Esdaile told her that it was only for a year, that they had nothing to leave her, and that in after life a regret *might* spring up in her heart because she had not made the trial. But all to no purpose.

Nelly would not listen; she did not want money, she never should, and she should die before the year was out living with that ugly, ill-tempered old man.

"Nay, Nelly dear, he only looks cross. In years gone by he seemed so much older than your dear mother, that I took little notice of him; but I remember she always said that he had a good heart; and I must say that his remembering her so faithfully and finding out her child, makes it look as if her opinion was correct. I am sure it is a bitter trial to us to part with our darling, though I know she will come back. Still I suppose it is our duty to let you go; at least, George thinks so."

At these words Nelly springs up from where she has been pillowing her pretty head, and, with flushed face and trembling voice, says—

"What did you say, auntie? George says I ought to go; then, of course, I had better do so; if every one thinks it is right, it is foolish in me to oppose them." And before Mrs Esdaile can answer her she runs out of the room to fling herself on her own little bed, and cry, and moan, and feel more miserable than she ever did before.

Then George did not care for her; he could say that it was best that she should go; he could think

that she might prize this horrid old man's money more than their love. "Oh, George, how could you?" sobs the poor child. Nelly knew nothing of a love great in its calm strength, feeling its overmastering power, and fearing lest that power should make it selfish and exacting towards its object. Nelly's sharp pain was not so bad to bear as the dull, heavy load George carried about with him—a burden which he knew he must carry, but which was none the lighter on that account. But our little Nell had a good spirit, and, acting up to what she thought right and proper, she bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair, and determined that George should not see how sore the trial was to her. So she described Mr Davidson to Jack, and tried to mimic the way in which he said that she was a "varra modest-spoken, weel-mannered young leddie." She declared she should soon talk in the same way, and held imaginary dialogues with Jack until Mrs Esdaile declared that she would be ill, so excited was she. George, amid all this, looked on bitterly, and wondered whether women had much feeling after all. This continued all the time Nelly remained; and although Mr and Mrs Esdaile often spoke of her fits of tears and depression, and Fred and Jack bewailed the hard decision, and were loud in their

hatred of Mr Davidson, George was silent, and seemed almost to avoid her. He was little at home, and had never once said that he was sorry she was going.

All these things were going on just as the New Year was setting in, for Mr Davidson had made his first appearance the day after Christmas Day, and by that day week Nelly's fate was decided. She and Mr and Mrs Esdaile were to start for Cheltenham, where Mr Davidson was, on the 5th of January.

"Then," said Jack, in a very doleful voice, "won't you be back by next Christmas Day, Nell? Oh, I say this is too bad; we shan't have any fun. What's the good of a plum-pudding unless you are here to stone the raisins, and stir it, and put up the holly and all the rest of it? Oh, Nell, promise you'll come back by Christmas Day. I'm sure old Davidson will have had enough of you by that time."

"That I am sure he will," answered tearful Nelly; "and I promise you, Jack, that I will return and eat my Christmas dinner at home;" and then, at the thought of the many dinners to be eaten away from home, poor Nelly breaks down again. You see she was not like a fashionable young lady,

accustomed to go visiting. Had she been so, this separation would have been nothing, but all the years she had lived with the Esdailes Nelly had never once been away from them for a night, and now to go entirely among strangers, and not see or hear of her own dear ones, seemed terrible indeed.

It was a very busy time. Mr Davidson had given Mrs Esdaile a cheque, which she was to fill in, saying the money was to be spent in getting everything suitable for a young lady. And now one parcel arrived and now another; then the dresses came home, and must be tried on; and Mrs Esdaile and Nelly forgot they had to part in the excitement of a violet silk, or their satisfaction at having chosen the black velveteen. Then the seal-skin hat was so becoming, that papa says they must give her a kiss all round. At this Fred goes down on his knees, and gives her a most chivalrous salute; and Jack, declaring she looks scrumptious, makes a dash at her that nearly knocks the hat off; and then Nelly stands before George, and a sudden shyness makes her get red, and say, "I must put up my hair; I do believe Jack has pulled it down." And before she has time to look up or say more, George has risen and is going out of the room, and Nelly could cry with vexation that she had ever gone near him.

She runs up-stairs, and George comes back angry with himself that he should have shown such ill-temper, and be jealous because she lingered with the others, and seemed reluctant to come to him.

At last Thursday morning comes, and the boxes are packed, and the good-byes to her few friends said, and all her last requests uttered—to look after her cat and feed the bird, and give him a nice bit of sugar every morning, and to be sure to attend to a myrtle, which it is thought may bloom next year.

The house is in a state of great excitement, Mrs Esdaile seeming to think Martha quite incapable, and indulge many fears that the dear boys will not have anything comfortable to eat until she returns. Mr Esdaile walks through every room in the house, at intervals of five minutes, to be quite certain that they have left nothing behind them. Then he opens the door and looks down the street, shuts it, consults his watch, and hopes that the cabman does not intend to be late. George had said in the morning that he should return in the middle of the day, and see them again, but there is no sign of him yet; and Mrs Esdaile hopes Mr Luxmore won't be inconsistent enough to detain him; she wouldn't feel quite comfortable at going, for she never bade him good-bye this morning.

Mr Esdaile laughingly declares that one would imagine they were going to the coast of Africa, there is such a fuss, but still he keeps looking in the direction George would come, and calls out in a delighted voice, "All right, my dear, here he comes, just in time, too." Then up comes the cab, and the bustle increases; and in the midst of it, Nelly goes into the boys' den, where she finds George looking for some twine, and thinks she will say good-bye at once. So she begins in a very shaky voice,

"Good-bye, George, and I hope you will soon be a barrister, and thank you for having been so kind to me;" and here the poor little thing fairly broke down, and sobbed out, "Oh, don't forget me. Let me always be your—"

I wonder what she wanted always to be? Nelly never said it, and George never heard it; for, forgetting all but that she was really going away, he had caught her in his arms, and was covering her fair face with kisses. True, the only words he spoke was when he put her from him, and then he only echoed her own,

"Forget you, Nelly!"

Here Martha rushed in with, "Oh, Miss, master's

calling for you everywhere; he says he knows you'll be too late."

And Nelly runs down, her heart lighter than her feet, catches up her cat, and squeezes the breath nearly out of its body, grips hold of Martha's hand, and wrings it with "Good-bye, dear old Martha, dear old house, dear old street, dear everybody, until Christmas, when I shall see you again."

Then, as they drive off, she bursts into a great flood of tears, tears that seem to wash away every cloud from her heart, and form a bright rainbow, promising nothing but happiness. For Nelly's heart is young and elastic, and all doubt is gone, fear has vanished; George loves her, and what can harm her? She never thinks about him and his uncertainty, whether his love is returned; indeed, I believe, had such a thought been suggested to her, she would have been almost indignant at the idea that George could bestow such a gift on any one, and it not be received and heartily responded to. Ah! our little Nelly prized the gift too highly, had mounted her hero on too lofty a pedestal, to have any doubt but that he should know when he, her king, held out the sceptre, the queen of his heart would greatly rejoice. So to Mr and Mrs Esdaile Nelly was a mystery. That she should have so

violently opposed going, and up to the very last moment bemoaned her fate, weeping over everything because it was the last time she should do it, and speaking of her return almost as if it was a thing she had a presentiment would never take place, and then suddenly all her energy comes back again—was what they could not account for. When they reach Mr Davidson, at Cheltenham, she speaks to him so nicely, and says quite what they would have wished. It is at their desire, she says, that she has accepted his offer, but though she feels very, very grateful, she knows she shall choose to return to those who are dearer to her than the world.

"May be, my dear," said the old gentleman, "dearer than the world is now, but, as you have seen very little of it yet, you are no fair judge."

It was a sad parting with Mrs Esdaile; but most of the soothing now came from Nelly.

"Don't cry, auntie dear; if you are ill I am to come to you, and if I am ill you are to come to me; and a year will soon pass away. Wherever I am, I shall always be thinking of you and dear papa, and Fred, and Jack, and—and—George; and I feel God will spare us all until Christmas day, when we shall meet again."

Mrs Esdaile would not confess it even to herself,
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but a voice within would worry her by asking if it was not natural for a young girl to be carried away by having a handsome house and carriage, and fine clothes; and although Mr Davidson was very silent, and stern, and cynical, he was evidently resolved on trying to unbend to Nelly. Would he succeed, and would she give them up? If so, "my poor boy"—and Nelly is forgotten in sympathy for George.

Three months passed, and then came a letter from Mr Davidson, saying that he thought it right to inform Mrs Esdaile that he and Miss Eleanor Hall were about to leave England for a continental tour, but in case of any urgency for writing, a letter addressed to the care of his agents in the Rue de Richelieu would be forwarded with all despatch. Miss Hall was quite well, and would, doubtless, have sent some message did she know he was writing, but she was at that moment out making some purchases. The letter was dated from Claridge's Hotel, and was as stiff and formal as the writer. That letter somehow seemed to build up such a wall between them and Nelly—that she should be in London—close to them, perhaps, and they never see her; it was hard, indeed; and now the sea would be between them. Fred and Jack were loud in declaring that they did not believe she would ever

return. Mrs Esdaile, though she stoutly held that Nelly would never change, looked anxiously at George, who, between anxiety and study, began to have a worn look and an irritable manner, that told his mother how ill his heart was at ease.

And Nelly; is she pining and sighing, and still bemoaning her fate? No, indeed. The little puss is thoroughly enjoying everything; making herself look distracting in the most bewitching of Parisian costumes, accepting all the attention bestowed very freely on Mr Davidson's heiress by Mr Davidson's friends and acquaintances, driving in the Champs Elysées in the afternoon, and carrying off the silent, grave old man to some place of entertainment in the evening. She is enjoying her six weeks' visit to Paris so completely, that he often looks at her and shakes his head, muttering, "All alike—no heart, no heart."

But when the day is done, and the fine clothes taken off, and the maid dismissed, he cannot hear the prayers our little Nelly utters for the safety and protection of her loved ones—the blessings she asks for them. The chief worldly prayer for herself is that they may be spared to meet and love each other, and never part again. Then their photographs are looked at and kissed, and bidden good night.

Only two are kept in her hand, and on them she pillows her fair cheek, and sinks off to sleep as sweetly as a child who holds his greatest treasure in his grasp.

So there is not much fear for Nelly, she can enjoy Paris and Switzerland, as it is only natural she should. But half her interest is to think what a lot she will have to tell them all; and she keeps a diary, that she may be quite certain as to where she saw the picture of St Peter crucified with his head downwards; and where the bow is that William Tell used in shooting the apple from his son's head; and to make particular notes about Zurich, because auntie's favourite song among the boys was "By the margin of fair Zurich's waters." In all she sees and does the tide of love turns homeward, and ever drifts her thoughts thither; but she is very silent about them, for Mr Davidson, though kind in action, is somewhat sharp in speech. He indulges in rather caustic remarks on the fair sex, and makes little sneering comments on their aptitude for domestic love and happiness, illustrating these remarks by pointing to some of the specimens they meet at the hotels, whose only aim in life, he says, is amusement, dress, and attracting notice. So Nelly tightly closes up her sweet warm feelings and im-

pulses, lest Mr Davidson should sneer at them also, and turn them into ridicule.

On the very day on which George made his maiden speech Nelly is at Ouchy, and circumstances combine to make them both think especially of each other. George, in the hour of success, naturally turns to her, with whom he wishes to share every joy and sorrow, and is led to think how much more triumphant he would have felt could he have seen her bright eyes dancing with delight and beaming with love for him. And then a thought creeps in—suppose you should never have her to cheer your life, what would life be? And such a sharp pain comes into the brave young heart, that he is fain to ask God's help to bear it. Suspense seemed so hard to him. If he could but have told her all she was to him—how she sat enthroned in the life of his heart and love; then he felt she would—she must come back, for since their parting George had been much more confident about Nelly's returning his devotion. Could he have asked her then, he was sure she would not have said No; but would she stand the test of the world, and be true to him in spite of the admiration she was sure to receive from men so much more able to charm a girl's fancy than he was? Yes, for Nelly sits and looks out of her

window on Geneva's Lake, and in her hand she holds a letter containing her first offer—an offer to give her all that the most worldly woman could desire, and only asking her love in return. And foolish little Nelly is positively crying, and saying, "I must have acted wrongly to make him think I could ever care for him. I suppose it was through my laughing and talking too much; but it seemed so nice to have somebody to remind one of the dear ones at home—somebody to whom I could say the first foolish thing that came into my head, and who did not look sneeringly at everything like "that grumpy Mr Davidson," though I am sure he is very kind. Oh, how I wish Mr Crawford had not done this! What shall I say to him? I am so sorry for him, and I feel as if I had done something wrong to George."

And while she sat, sometimes carried away by a grand castle-building, and sometimes thinking over the refusal she should write to Mr Crawford, there came a knock at the door, and Mr Davidson himself entered with a letter in his hand, which Nelly saw was also from her admirer. When he explained its contents the poor girl was more covered with confusion than ever. What would he think of her—he who did not seem to believe that

women were born for anything beyond dressing themselves and wasting their time—whose panacea for their sorrows and disappointments was "Take them out shopping?" Oh, she could not breathe the word love to him. So she told him, in as few words as possible, that she was very sorry for Mr Crawford, who had always been so kind to her; but she hoped he would think no more of her, for she was quite sure she should never like anybody they met. And here the tears began to fall afresh. It was just as she thought; the hard-hearted, horrid old man quite chuckled, rubbed his hands, and took more snuff than she had ever seen him take before. For days after Nelly often found him with his eyes fixed upon her, and then he would turn away with a positive grin on his hard, old, brown face. Before September was out they were in Scotland, and while there Nelly began quite to like her grim old companion. He could not let her be ignorant of the stories of his native land, and when, with all the eloquence which true love of country gives to the rudest tongue, he described some desperate fray, or told some touching story of love and chivalry, Nelly wondered what made him at other times so cynical, morose, and gloomy, putting himself into fits of passion for

the most trivial thing, and frightening people by the way he roared at them if they presumed to contradict him.

Nelly had ceased counting the months, and was now beginning to count the weeks to Christmas, when she should return home. She wondered if they would think her altered, and took out her old photograph, and looked at it. Then she ran to the glass, and had a good survey of her personal appearance. She really believed she was improved; perhaps it was that her dresses were better made, and her hair better done up. Of course, she would have to go back to contriving her own clothes, as she and auntie used to do; and she had learnt so many things from her maid that auntie would be quite astonished at her improvement.

Day after day she waited, hoping that Mr Davidson would open the conversation as to her decision. They were now back at Cheltenham, and it wanted but a week to Christmas Day; and, finding that he was still silent, she determined one morning to broach the subject. So, with much fear, trembling, and with rather a guilty feeling, she went down into his morning-room. There he sat, engaged in reading, his spare, thin figure resembling a cross-peg on which to hang his loose overcoat.

He never once looked up even to see who had entered. This was not promising, so Nelly thought she would lead up to what she had to say by a little general conversation. She looked out of the window, and said, "I think the weather is to be fine." But this drew no notice. Perhaps he didn't hear me, Nelly thought, for she had noticed that sometimes he was a little deaf, and would desire you to repeat your remark in a way that invariably made you feel that you had said the most silly thing in the world. However, Nell had determined to have her say, so she returned to the charge.

"It's a very fine morning."

"Is it?" answered her companion.

Now this was too bad. Nelly left the window, and, with a desperate feeling, stood at the end of the table, and suddenly came out with—

"Oh, Mr Davidson, if you please, next Thursday is Christmas Day, and I want, that is, I wish to be very much obliged to you for all your kindness, but I would rather go home."

For a moment she wondered if he had heard her, for he waited, and apparently finished the sentence he was reading, took up a paper-knife, and marked the place, slowly lifted his rheumatic leg off its rest, and then sat bolt upright, and looked at her, saying—

"May I trouble you to repeat your remark to me again?"

This time Nell's face got very red, but she once more out with her decision bravely.

"I said next Thursday is Christmas Day, and I wish to return home, if you please."

"Oh, twelve months in the world hasn't cured you, then? You're still a fool," he replied.

"A fool!" said Nelly. "I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Then I'll tell you what I mean, Miss Eleanor. You're an orphan and penniless, and if you return to your home, as you call it, you will be dependent, and dependent too upon people who have to make a struggle for their own living, while I, holding the most distant tie of blood as a claim, offer you a home and everything you can want while I live, and when I am dead you'll find yourself mistress of a handsome fortune. But if you choose rather to return and live with this Quixotic family in their poverty-stricken house, and deprive them of the few comforts their poor income can allow them, why, all I say is, go, but don't look for a farthing from me, for you won't have it."

"And I don't want it," said Nelly, all ablaze with indignation. "I never wanted your money,

nor wished to come here at all, only Mr Esdaile said it was not fair to myself to give up a thing I was not then in a position to value. I told you from the first that I should choose to go home. Yes, sir, you may sneer, but it is my home, and I am not dependent. God has put such love into our hearts though I know I owe everything I possess to them, I would not have it otherwise though I could. Do you think they ever felt the sacrifices they have made for me? Never! they have given me all they could freely, and I have taken it as freely; and we have only felt we were bound closer to each other in this way. To you, sir, I do feel grateful, oppressed even by my obligations; but there is a love great enough to lay aside all such feelings as these."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the old man, "she's got 'a will of her own;' I have found the Scotch blood at last."

But Nelly was too excited to hear the remark, or to heed the great compliment he intended to pay her. She only listened when he said—

"All very sentimental, I have no doubt, but people can't live on sentiment, as you'll discover when you are married to one of the loafing sons, which I suppose is what they'll inveigle you into."

Poor Nell! Fancy her feelings at hearing her handsome, clever-looking George called a loafing young man. Of course, Mr Davidson meant George; nobody could be silly enough to think that she would marry Fred or Jack; and then to dare to say they would inveigle her. If there were fifty Mr Davidsons present, she would not let such an insult pass. So, setting her little mouth firmly together, innocent Nelly lets out her secret at once, making the old grey eyes twinkle and the thin lips twitch like a wicked brownie, as he was.

"I never expected you to enter into what you term my sentiment, Mr Davidson, but as to being inveigled into marrying one of Mrs Esdaile's sons, I can only tell you that there's not a girl in the world but might be proud to be George Esdaile's wife; and if he only chooses me, however little we may have to live upon, I wouldn't change places with a queen."

And such a sunny look came over the fresh young face that a chord is touched, and the old man leans his head upon his hand, and Nelly, fearing that she has not spoken quite properly, bends a little towards him, and says—

"But forgetting all this, dear Mr Davidson, think me anything but unmindful of your goodness, and

of the kindness which made you seek out my mother's child; and though I cannot live with you, still remember your old friend's daughter, from whom you will ever be entitled to respect and gratitude; and if ever you are ill, or think I could—" but here she was stopped by—

"There, there, child, that will do; go away, and say no more about it. I will see you are home by Christmas Day."

There were busy hands, but rather heavy hearts in Charleswood Street. It was Christmas Eve, and yet there were no tidings of Nelly. Jack, however determined to believe to the last moment that she would return. Mrs Esdaile held stoutly by him, and helped him to cut out the letters to form "Welcome," which Jack had determined should be set up in red, white, and blue, or ornamented with a wreath of holly. Below it Nelly's portrait was to be placed. Papa quite entered into the plan, but rather damped Jack's energy by suggesting that it should be made so that it could be easily taken down if it was not wanted. Fred, to their great relief, went out to spend the evening at the house of a young lady, to whom, since Nelly's absence, he had become violently attached, while poor George sat first in one room, and then in another,

trying to write—to read—to do anything to still the anxiety that seemed to master him.

Christmas morning dawned at length, and such a lovely morning, too; bright, and crisp, and cheerful, and quite in tune with the merry bells, and happy faces, and the holiday air which pervades every nook and corner of dear old England. Each of the Esdailes felt that that day Nelly's name could not be mentioned in the family circle. Even Jack was silent. He adorned old Tom, her cat, with an enormous bow of rose-coloured ribbon, which he had bought for the purpose, causing that poor animal to be as ill at ease as the rest of the family. The bird sang in a smart new cage, the result of a subscription, and the myrtle pot was adorned with a frill like a ham. Dick had arrived the night before, and proved a most valuable acquisition, having much to hear and to tell, and thus preventing the awkward silence which otherwise they would have fallen into every now and then.

"Come, boys," says the father, "let's be off to church, and thank God for sparing us to sing our Christmas hymn together again."

When the three youngest have left the room, he turns to where Mary Esdaile is leaning her

head against her son in that dumb sympathy which is more powerful than words, and, putting his arms round her, says—

"George, my boy, don't despair. Your mother and I in all our troubles found it our greatest comfort to know "God is where he was,"—ready to lighten the burden of every one who tries bravely to bear it. Don't think we don't feel for you because we ask you to go with us, and on this day, above all others, try to forget trials and disappointments, and dwell only on our comforts and mercies, and praise the hand which so liberally bestows them."

So when they all walked off together, Mrs Esdaile on her husband's arm, and her eldest son on the other side, George talked away most cheerfully. The church door was reached before they had decided which of them was most like their father, and which like their mother. One opinion was universal—that Jack was his father's very image—a compliment which did not seem to meet with that young gentleman's approval, since he declared "it was a shame of them all to foist him off upon the "governor" because he was the youngest."

After church was over, and they turned homewards, some feeling seemed to draw them all closer

together, and as the boys put their arms into each other's, the mother looked into her husband's face, and saw her proud happy thoughts reflected back. As they stood on the step the cloud seemed hovering over them again for a minute, but before their faces were quite grave the door was flung open, and a cry arose of "Here she is! Hurrah! Didn't I say she'd come back? Oh! my darling." Nelly is in every one's arms at once, and crying and laughing at the same moment. Nobody knew what was said for the next half hour; they had to tell all they had thought and felt, how they feared she would not be able, after all, perhaps, to keep her promise, and Nelly declared Mr Davidson was so provoking. He had come up to London with her two days before, and, though she was ready long before ten o'clock, he kept her, first by one pretext, and then another, all the while telling her that she had better stay with him, as by that time they had certainly given her up, and were thanking him for relieving them of such a plague. At this point a torrent of epithets and exclamations was hurled at Mr Davidson.

"And since I told him I was going to return home," continued Nelly, "he has been more grumpy than ever, snapping and snarling at everybody and

everything. The servants say it is all his liver, and he says he hasn't got one, so I don't know which it is, but certainly something about him is quite wrong."

"Ah!" said Mr Esdaile, "I'll tell you the secret. He hasn't had a tyrant like this" (patting his wife's cheek) "to keep him in order; so let him be a warning to you, boys, for it's better to be a slave to somebody than a slave to yourself."

"Indeed you are right," answered George, laughing, "for I have been vexing, tormenting, and worrying myself most sorely since Nelly has been away."

"Then take your tyrant," said his father, putting Nelly towards him.

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Mrs Esdaile, fearing the lovers might not like this publicity of their unexpressed feelings, "you mustn't——"

"Never mind, mother," said George, who has put his arm round Nelly, "there is a language more powerful than words; and I know, before all the world, that now I can claim Nelly as my own."

And that impertinent little Nell, though her face was like a "red red rose," never looked down, but nodded and smiled her approval, and pursed up

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her little mouth to receive a kiss from each one there."

"Well, I don't care," says Jack, "I call it a jolly shame. Here's Nell been away a whole year, and the first minute she comes back George goes and chouses everybody else out of her."

I couldn't describe the happy day they had, nor the triumph of Martha, who "know'd she was coming back, and laid a place for her;" nor the pudding, which Nelly said was more delicious than anything she had ever tasted when away, owing, as Jack would have it, to his having superintended the making of it. At which everybody pretended to notice a scarcity of fruit and candied peel. Then each one had to have their health drunk, and something special to be congratulated upon that had happened to them this year. At length Mrs Esdaile says—

"Now *I* have some one's health to propose; that is, Mr Davidson's. In the midst of all our happiness I cannot help thinking of the poor lonely old man."

"Why, he wanted to steal our Nell from us," cried Jack.

"Ah! she's very unfortunate, Jack," replied his father; "she has escaped one thief to fall immediately

into the hands of another. However, let us all join in drinking Mr Davidson's health."

Then Nelly continued—

"My wish is that the next heir he chooses may not be so rich in love, and may therefore value his money more, and try to make him more happy."

"Hurrah!" cried Jack, "here's grumpy old Davidson's health, and a new liver to him."

"But," said Nelly, "I'm forgetting he gave me a letter, which was not to be opened until after dinner. Here it is."

"Ah! that's your ticket of discharge, Nell, with the corner cut off, as Hal would say. Shall I read it?—or George had better, then he'll be prepared for the worst." So George opened the letter and began:—

"MY DEAR ELEANOR,

"Before you open this letter you will, no doubt, after the manner of your sex, have freely commented on me and my actions. I heard your verdict of me long ago—'not a bad old man, but so grumpy.' That verdict is not very wide of the mark. My life has been made up of disappointments—disappointments at which I laugh now, and

wonder how they could have wrinkled my heart and my face. Your mother was the bright star of days when I had faith in myself and all around me; though a wise Providence denied me the blessing of her love, her memory forbade me to believe that truth, and love, and pure sweet womanhood had become an idle tale. Your loving heart and faithful trust to those whom you prized more dearly than worldly wealth daily improved me, and wore off some of the crust of worldliness which encircled many good feelings which I once possessed.

"At first I doubted you; but now—and this is the highest praise I could accord to any mortal—holding your mother, as I do, the perfect type of a woman loving, tender, and true, I can say in you she lives again.

"Grumpy, my dear, I shall ever be, but henceforth I hope not 'a bad old man;' and my money, which I have often thought of with bitterness, will acquire a new value to me, when I know that it will speed the union of yourself with that very worthy young man to whom you have given the blessing of your love.

"To-morrow I am coming to see you, and to thank our good kind friends for having trained you

up to be worthy of your mother's honourable name, and so rendered a life-long obligation to

"Your sincere friend and cousin,

"DONALD DAVIDSON."

"Miss Eleanor Hall."

And come he did, and always declared he could never regain his stiffness, because Nelly took all the starch out of him when she sobbed out her penitence and told him how she had thought him unfeeling, and cruel, and hard-hearted, and that he was quite mistaken in her, for she was a very wicked ungrateful girl. He had known of George's love for her from the first, for Mr Esdaile had spoken of it to him, and he quite approved of her choice.

Before New Year's Day they were all the best friends in the world. The old man declared that he began to feel as he did when he was young, and knew the meaning of a home. Jack was his special favourite, for he made no secret of the light in which he had formerly viewed Mr Davidson, and the result was that, after they had enjoyed some treat together, which Jack declared to have been particularly jolly, and "I shouldn't have seen it,

sir, if it hadn't been for you," the old gentleman would slyly say, "Then, after all, it was not such an ill wind that brought that 'grumpy Mr Davidson.'"

NOTRE DAME DES SEPT DOULEURS.

I.

THE 20th of May is a day I always remember and keep, especially dedicating it to raking up old memories, airing old grievances, looking in the glass to find out all the wrinkles in my face, no longer so young nor so pleasant to look upon as it was some twenty years ago, when I was suddenly recalled from an excursion I had been making in fairyland, and found myself put down at one of the first stations in the "vale of tears." One of these anniversaries happened while I was at Tourville; and with a determination not to inflict my dulness on my companions, I rose early to try and walk off some of my sad humour. When I reached the summit of the hill I was not sorry to go into the Church of "Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs" and sit quiet. Silently nursing my grief, the place

I was in forgotten, the people around me unseen, memory sometimes giving me a sharp stab and anon "pouring in oil and wine," my heart, which was "hot and restless," grew calmer, and my senses one by one began to open. I heard the low solemn tones of the organ, smelt the faint lingering scent of the incense, and saw I was sitting near an altar of carved white marble, the centre piece being the Virgin contemplating her Divine Son. The figures were half hidden by vases holding white and gold lilies; the altar-cloth was blue, and standing in front were two pots holding each a lovely Marguerite, the votive offering, I supposed, of the woman who knelt at the low rail behind them; and then my eyes must needs rest upon her, and all my artist admiration be filled to the brim by her graceful attitude—the arms folded over her breast, the small head thrown slightly back to let her eyes fall on the inscription "Virgini Compatienti." I could not see her face, but I could imagine the beauty of those eyes, dark and deep-set, the creamy paleness of the skin, the full passionate mouth, quivering in its intensity of feeling, and the rapt, earnest expression. I would not disturb her for the world, but I must look upon her face. So I sat waiting for her to turn, thinking if I took out the old-

fashioned comb what a wealth of raven locks I should set free, and wondering with strange curiosity what sorrow or joy brought her there. She moves; the head slowly droops down, and while I am conjuring up the face now that the heavy lashes lie on the cheek, the thick white lids hide the eyes, she rises and turns full upon me, and I spring to my feet, my face all red with surprise and disappointment to find that this exquisite figure, with grace in every movement, and a head for Psyche, belongs to a face sharp-featured, sunken-eyed, and pale. "Pardon, Madame," I involuntarily exclaimed, feeling how rude she must think my brusque movement and fixed stare. She gave me a slight inclination of her head, and I saw her leave the church, and a few minutes after I followed, and went out to the little churchyard overlooking the valley of the Seine. There, too, she sat, looking down on the magnificent view, her face wearing a look that comes only from a heart filled with great contentment. I suppose it was my peculiar frame of mind that made me feel drawn towards any one who seemed to be suffering or to have suffered, and now impelled me to go near her and make some observation on the lovely scene before us. We were soon chatting pleasantly enough on the surround-

ing objects, I explaining what our English churches were like, and trying to convey to her mind the estimation in which we held the Virgin. "We only reverence her," I said; "we never pray to her nor ask her aid in any way."

She turned her earnest face towards me, and said, "How sad!" in such a pitying tone that I was emboldened to ask her, would she think it impertinent curiosity if I wanted to know what brought her that morning to the church? She hesitated for a moment and then replied,

"The heart of Madame is heavy, perhaps; shall I tell her my little history? Oh, a very simple story, only to show how by our faith and His love the good God allows our burdens to be removed and our sorrows turned into joy."

I silently assented, and she began.

"You have been down the Rue St Dominique, and shivered, perhaps, to think how miserable to live in a street long and narrow, the grim, black-looking old houses trying to stretch across and touch each other, and by meeting exclude the smallest ray of sunshine, lest when it has struggled through, it will light up some of the curious old carved work about them, and reveal the dark stories which, though time has thrown a veil over them, it

is whispered, have had their tragedies played out there. Above the diamond-paned windows of one of the oldest of these wooden-fronted houses is a board which tells you that there lives Denise Gastel; and there he lived four-and-twenty years ago, and had a little daughter born to him, whose eyes looked so blue and her face so fair that they named her Veronique. She grew to be the pet of the whole street, and you might meet her toddling from one house to the other, her unsteady steps guided by some neighbour's child, but most frequently by a handsome, fair boy, the son of Jacques Defour, who lived in the next house. Jacques was a stern man, who had taken little pleasure in life since he lost his wife, who died when Antoine was born, and now Antoine was disappointing him by growing a dreamy boy, who would rather sit and listen entranced to the sound of the organ at the cathedral, than play at soldiers or pranks in the tanner's yard or among the dyer's vats. Monsieur le Curé took much notice of Antoine, and got him into favour with Monsieur Prasdil, the organist, and by the time Antoine was fourteen, in spite of Jacques Defour's opposition and anger, he was forced to allow his son to go to Paris, where a friend of Monsieur Prasdil offered to teach him, and make him a great

musician like himself. It was a grand opportunity, every one said, but Jacques only told them to thank Heaven for not sending them such a 'ganache,' whom idleness alone prevented from being an honest tanner, as his father and grandfather had been before him. Antoine loved his father, and it was no small grief to the boy's sensitive nature to see how they misunderstood and vexed each other. Often would the little Veronique find him moody and oppressed, and by putting her arms round him, and rubbing her cheek against his, show him mute sympathy with a grief she could not understand. One April morning at four o'clock young Antoine left the old Rue St Dominique to enter on his new life. Ah, Madame, slow may be the 'steps that leave a heart behind,' but heavy is the heart which leaves no love behind; to go out into the world shrinking, fearing, leaving no loving mother to look at the vacant chair, and send up a prayer for blessing and protection on her absent darling; no dear sister to tell how sweet the next meeting will be, when the loved one returns with all the honours she knows are but waiting to be heaped upon him. Alas, poor Antoine! beyond the day nobody but the little Veronique would miss him, and the heart, hungering for love, made him turn and take a last

look at her window, and at it, he says, he saw an angel, for the child, awakened by the stir outside, had crept from her little bed and ran to the window, and was, in her eager anxiety to attract his attention, stretching out her arms towards him. Antoine will always have it that his love sprang into being at that moment, and never after did he think of his home in the grim old street but he saw that window, and between the pots of Marguerites and Narcissus the little face all flushed with grief, the tears standing in her eyes, and her mouth parted as she calls him to "Come back, come back."

"After Antoine had left, Jacques Defour married again, and all love for his boy seemed to die straight away. I think he was proud when he heard how clever the master thought Antoine—that he had assisted in playing the organ at mass, and that it was not impossible that at some distant day the realization of the boy's dreams might come to pass, and he might be organist in the grand old church we love so well, but he seldom sent a letter, and never asked him home for a holiday.

"The little Veronique grew into a tall girl,—they called her a beauty, and Denise Gastel, her father, had many a sharp word to say to the smart young soldiers who always took such an interest

in the flowers which blossomed so gaily in front of the little window, where Veronique and her young sister Babette sat. Many pretty gifts had found their way from Paris to the Rue St Dominique, and when Veronique's fête day came round, she looked forward with more eagerness to Antoine's present than to any of the numerous gifts she knew would come to her. I know not whether she was vain, because she wore her beauty as a queen might wear her crown,—it was hers by right, she thought, and if people offered homage, it was only that which was due to her: she had no soft heart for the girls who sat out the dance, who had no lover to tell them how they outshone all others. If her beauty drew away an admirer from one to whom before he had been devoted, she only felt triumph, not regret; wherever she went *of course* she had most attention. Was she not the 'belle of Tourville'? the 'flower of the Rue St Dominique'? and had not a painter asked permission to paint her picture and taken it to Paris with him? She would not marry for a long time; then, if Antoine became a great man, and the organist perhaps, of St Pierre, she would marry *him*, but not until she had reduced him to despair by tantalizing him with jealousy of all her other lovers. You

shake your head, Madame; ah! you will pity her yet."

"While all this was going on in Tourville, in Paris there was one very sad heart,—that heart belonged to Antoine Defour. You would not have recognized bright sunny-faced Antoine, for his laughing blue eyes were hidden by ugly dark spectacles, and his smiling mouth pinched with the anxiety to know whether he should ever regain his sight. In his little garret he had studied so hard to overcome the defects in his imperfect education, that his eyes became weaker and weaker, until the doctor said they must have perfect rest or his sight would go. Perfect rest! that almost meant starvation, for Antoine nearly supported himself by copying music for part-singing and playing. So now his days were spent in wandering from one church to another. Sometimes he went to St Roch, then to St Eustache, then to St Clotilde—anywhere, to hear music, not to pray. The poor heart was as dim and blind as the eyes, yet he felt no anxiety about that; but as he grew weaker he found even this pleasure must be given up, for now, as the peals of the organ fell upon his ear, or the sweet voices of the choir sent up their praise, the tears rained from his poor weak eyes, leaving them more inflamed and dark

than ever. What pleasure, what comfort, had Antoine? If he wandered into the gardens of the Tuileries, and groped his way to a bench, his heart seemed to feel the more heavy because of the merry laughter of the children playing and romping in the sunshine, which he could only feel, not see, while their *bonnes*, disregarding the presence of the poor blind man, went on confiding to each other their little love-stories, and the hopes of enjoyment they had for the next *fête-day*. Weary of this, he would move on to the Champs Elysées. Worse and worse: the roll of the carriages and gay hum of passers-by only filled him with bitterness. Why should hundreds of people be happy, and have wealth, and beauty, and all they wanted, while he—he only asked for health and strength? and then, spite of hardship and poverty, he could revel in his mistress—art, and envied not the Emperor himself. But blind, half starving, his pride bent, and forced to accept charity from those he had worked for—oh, would to God he could die! for if in the end he had to return to his father useless, helpless, dependent, then surely the bitterness of death would be outdone. And Veronique, too, she was like the rest of the world—could acknowledge his presents, which he had stinted himself to send her—could

return a shy note to his long, earnest letter; but nearly six months had passed, and not one word from her, though she must have heard from his father of his affliction, because Jacques Defour had written to say, when he could do nothing else he had better come home. And it was fast coming to this. He could do nothing else; he must return to the old house. Oh, what a different return from that his imagination had pictured, when he had seen Monsieur Prasdil allowing his old favourite to take the organ, and he, inspired, would play as he had never done before; and below would be his boyish friends, his father, and blue-eyed Veronique: and then, after mass, Monsieur le Curé would say some kind words of approval, and his father, in his rough way, would be touched, and say he forgave his son now for not being a tanner: and Veronique, his child-love, would flush and look as he remembered she had done at parting, and when he had drawn her apart, and they walked together among the old trees close by, he would whisper, "Veronique, you called after me when I left, 'Antoine, come back!' The echo of those words has dwelt in my heart all these years. I *have* come back!" and the thrill of his voice and the love in his eyes would tell her it was to claim her as his wife!

"How changed were these pictures now! The blackness of the grim old street was but a type of his life to come. A blind beggar, a burden to his father, until he grew, perhaps, into an old man; and then, as his imagination called up various figures he had seen sitting on the steps of churches, reminding the passers-by of their misery by rattling their tin platters, he threw himself down in a passion of tears, entreating God to release him from his wretchedness and desolation.

II.

"ALL this happened seven years ago; and perhaps Madame knows that at that time Tourville was swept over by a terrible fever. It raged among its narrow streets, and only the Rue St Dominique was free. Some thought this was because of the water running fresh before the houses; some because of the tanner's yards. Any way, there was but one victim there, and that was Veronique. Nobody thought she would ever recover; but her youth, her strength, battled with the plague, and after robbing her of all her beauty, it left her to try and feebly struggle back to life; and Madame's womanly heart would have ached for the poor vain

child when she first saw herself after her calamity, —the round, rosy face pale and shrunken, eyes dimmed, hair gone, all beauty vanished! The sceptre had indeed departed from the ‘flower of the Rue St Dominique.’ But her torture was when some unlucky chance threw one of her former lovers in her way, to see the struggle between the wish not to wound her, and the shock given by her altered appearance. No; she could not get reconciled to it—to have walked in proud consciousness that every head turned to look again with admiration, and now to know that if she went out, they who knew her regarded her with pity, and they who knew her not did not look at her at all. Six months had passed since Veronique lost her beauty, and she was getting accustomed to hear people say, when Babette was praised, ‘She will never be equal to you, Veronique, before you had the fever.’ The young soldiers still looked up at the little window where the flowers blossomed so gaily, but they seldom saw but one head. Veronique shrank back now: she was very changed from the girl who sat still in her proud beauty, enjoying their sighs, and triumphing in their unreturned love!

“One evening there was an unusual stir in the

street in front of the doors; the neighbours stood in groups of four and five, discussing some event of evident interest, for with us, Madame, we all share each other's joys and sorrows. This excitement was caused by the return of Antoine, and from his father Veronique heard how Antoine had come back to be a burden on him for life. Jacques said it was of no use her coming in, for Antoine would let nobody talk to him or see him, if he could help it. Can you not fancy how the girl's heart warmed towards this poor fellow-sufferer? She had so dreaded his return, and because she had not heard from him, nor had a present come among the few which reached her this fête-day, she had felt very bitter towards her old friend. Now she could not even be sorry for his affliction, because of her joy that he would not see her altered face.

"The next morning was Sunday, and with much inward fear and trembling, though with great outward boldness, Veronique entered her neighbour's house, and walking straight up to Etienne said, 'Dear Etienne, thou hast not forgotten little Veronique, whose steps thou so carefully guidedst when she was a child? Until God removes this affliction thou must now trust thyself to her care: so come, we will go to mass together.' And after that, Ma-

dame, Antoine was always to be found with Veronique. She no longer shrunk from going out; she cared no more that people did not turn to look after her. Unheeded passed her former admirers, with some beauty whose rivalry she had formerly scorned. Antoine was becoming her world; to walk under the chestnut trees of the horse-fair with him, to go daily to St Pierre, and sometimes hear his fingers straying over the keys of the organ; to come on a fête-day, or Sunday, and sit in this very spot; this was more real enjoyment than the girl had experienced in the days of her power and beauty, when her heart was too small to care for any one but herself. But one remnant of the old vanity remained. No one had spoken to Etienne of the change in her, and when he told her in the soft autumn evenings, how he remembered her face; that the memory of it was his sweetest recollection; that even now he could tell how she was looking. 'Listen! he would describe her.' Oh, Madame, how could she break the charm? for to hear his soft, sad voice praising her, was music such as had never fallen on her ears before.

"So the autumn went into winter; and even in winter they could often go out, and in the evenings Antoine sat close by Veronique's side, and held her

wool or carded it, or did many helpful things, for now he was getting more accustomed to darkness. He still went to the hospital, and the good doctor was trying all his skill could devise to strengthen him;—he did not give him hope, but he bade him not cast it from him altogether. Sometimes the neighbours just laughed a little at Veronique about her blind lover, but she heeded not. She had resolved to learn some trade, so that Antoine should not burden any one, but be her loving care, and he should help her, that he might not feel it was she who was the bread-winner; and if, as she feared, he never regained his sight, why then he would never know her beauty had departed, and even when she was old, to him she would still be his ‘child love, Veronique.’ Antoine would often ask her, where did she meet her admirers? and reproach himself, saying it was he who kept her lovers from her; and then he would hide his face, and be so downcast and gloomy, because words rose thick and fast from his heart, which his lips dared not utter; but he might have said them, Madame, for as they who are in a barren land long for rain, so the girl thirsted to hear she was beloved.

“The winter passed and May came; and because it is the ‘Mois de Marie’ our churches were lovely

with decorations, and great pots of white lilies, azaleas, Marguerites, and all the flowers the pure and blessed Virgin loves to see her children bring as offerings to her. On the first Sunday the service was especially grand at St Pierre. The music was lovely, and Veronique could see how heavy was Antoine's heart because within him was the consciousness that, but for his affliction, he too could draw forth sounds from the organ which would lift up the souls of the hearers towards heaven.

"The sermon was given by the celebrated Père Raoul, and he told us how much *real faith* could do, and that during this month the ears of 'our Lady' were more especially to be gained by those who called upon her without doubt or fear, and with that earnest tender love they would have her clothe their petitions to her dear Son with; and while the words came from his mouth, swift into Veronique's heart flew the thought and resolve that she would ask for sight to be given to those poor darkened eyes, and that every morning during the month she would rise early enough to reach this very church, and ask the 'tender Mother' to intercede for her with Him who in days of old 'made the blind to see. He but *spake* the word and *immediately* they received sight.'

“Slowly and silently Antoine and Veronique returned to the old street, she looking lingeringly, lovingly, on his face, which was full of beauty. When they arrived home she went to her little room, and leaning her elbows on the mantel-shelf, looked long and earnestly at the plain colourless face she saw reflected in the old-fashioned dim looking-glass; and the tempter trying to dissuade her, whispered, ‘If he gets his sight, he will care no more for you, he will despise your deception; and should he offer to marry you, pity, not love, will prompt him.’ The bitter tears would drop at the fear lest this should prove true; but God, Madame, had, by trouble, so softened this little frivolous heart that Veronique felt should this even come to pass Antoine’s happiness was dearer than all else; why, she would have willingly given him her life, though that seemed not half so dear to her as his love!

“When morning dawned Veronique was on her way. She bade sleepy Babette keep her secret, for she had made a vow, she said, and was but fulfilling it. Babette whispered it to her mother, who hinted it to her father, and we Catholics respect these things too much to put obstacles in the way by undue curiosity. So Veronique’s visits passed

unquestioned. Strength was given her not to feel so very tired, for the way is long; but her heart was in her task, and she was never so weary as to deny Antoine his walk. Well, Madame, a week from that Monday the good doctor sent for Antoine, and when he went it was to see a famous man from your own country, who had come to Tourville for a holiday. From the moment he saw Antoine he took the greatest interest in him; and with Monsieur Charpentier's permission he altered the treatment and pursued an entirely new plan; but to carry it out he must go into the Hotel Dieu, as an operation would most probably be needed. That was a very dreary time,—nobody was permitted to see Antoine, and Veronique used to turn from the door with weary steps, and seating herself where she could catch a glimpse of the window of the room where the good sister said he lay, she wished that she had 'wings like a dove,' that she might hover round and comfort him. I cannot tell Madame how earnestly she prayed. Madame knows how the heart goes forth when its petition is for all it holds dear. Veronique knew that the pure and sainted Mary would hear her; and often when before her image she felt that Antoine's sight would come again, another prayer rose to her lips that his love might

be hers still, but she checked it as selfish. No; she had made her choice, and asked this great gift for her dear one,—the future she must leave to the good God, who ‘ordereth all things well.’

“May was nearly over, and for a whole fortnight nothing certain could be heard of Antoine. Jacques Defour hardly took the trouble to inquire for his son, and to poor Veronique the answers were, ‘Not so well,’ ‘better,’ ‘symptoms favourable,’ but on the last evening of the month the sister said that very day a successful operation had been performed, and now his recovery would depend on quiet and rest of mind and body; and six weeks after, as one Sunday afternoon Denise Gastel, his wife, Babette and Veronique sat enjoying rest, a quick footstep was heard which made Veronique’s heart beat like a ‘caged bird against its prison bars,’ and then suddenly stop and turn to stone. It was Antoine, who rushed into the room. At sight of him Denise and his wife threw up their hands in astonishment, Babette sprang from her seat, Veronique alone sat quiet. Then was it any wonder that Antoine should turn to Babette, and cry with a sob, ‘Veronique, God has heard my prayer,—I see your dear face again’? Oh, Madame, the bitterness of that moment! Before his mistake

was made known to him, the girl, carrying the heavy load of her poor bruised heart, was going as swiftly as she could towards St Genifrède hill, that she might find comfort from 'Notre Dame des Douleurs;' and when, exhausted, she reached the chapel, she could but throw herself before the blessed figures, and repeat the inscription 'Virgini Compatienti.' How long she kneeled there she knew not; but, when hours after she wearily rose to her feet and turned, she confronted the sad pale face of Antoine. Madame, they needed only to look into each other's eyes; there Veronique read that Antoine knew and forgave her bitterness and weakness, and Antoine read the love which had given birth to both; and folding her to his heart, he murmured, 'Veronique, my child-love, my joy, my wife, through the life we will spend together, remember that love is always blind.'

"They live in Paris now, Madame. Antoine is organist at St Eustache, and his name is known to all lovers of music; but every year during the Mois de Marie they spend one week at Tourville, coming each day to this chapel with some little offering to our blessed Lady, who heard them in their season of trial, and presented their petitions in the hour of their need.

"The story has seemed long, perhaps, and tired Madame; but she will pardon it, for I am Veronique, and see—Antoine my husband comes across the grass to meet me."

AT THE SIGN OF THE

GOLDEN CANISTER.

I.

NOT such a very long time ago there stood in a certain quarter of one of the oldest towns in England a low, long, gable-roofed house, adorned both outside and inside with much curious wood-work and carving. Long narrow windows, encircled with quaint wooden balconies, overshadowed one another, each story protruding beyond the story below, while on a wide black beam they who ran might read "Amour avec Loiaulte."

But very few people ever ran past the sign of the Golden Canister. Strangers stood to admire this relic of days long past, while the townspeople lingered about it, and finally sauntered in to have

a chat with Luke Barton, the owner of the shop and of its valuable stock of tea, coffee, and spices. These were all the wares that the Golden Canister *professed* to supply, though from its well-filled stores you might likewise obtain figs, raisins, nuts, honey, and like delicacies. For such common necessities as bacon, cheese, candles, and soap, you had to go elsewhere. No one ever spoke of Luke Barton as a grocer; it would have been looked upon as showing a want of due respect and consideration to one who was known far and near as Mr Barton of the Golden Canister, nay, whose house gentlefolks from all parts had come to see as a curiosity the like of which was not often to be come across.

The simple townsfolk did well to show pride in the old house—one where princes had sighed and sued in vain; where proud beauties had held revel, had despaired, been courted, neglected, and forgotten. But our story has to do with none of these; it only pretends to recount the simple everyday life of those who then dwelt there, and who lived, and loved, and played out their little tragedy with as much gladness and bitterness of heart as did those courtly dames, although their joys and griefs were all unheeded by the many who sighed to know the bygone histories of the great and noble, forgetting

that the natural cravings and disappointments of men and women have been in all ages pretty much the same.

At the Golden Canister lived Luke Barton; his wife, Lettice; Leonard, their son; and Phyllis, the only child of Luke's brother, left an orphan from her babyhood. That he should live until Leonard made Phyllis his wife, and the young pair took possession of the Golden Canister, was the grand wish of Luke's heart. And there seemed every prospect that his desire would be gratified. He chuckled over the idea of standing idly by, and seeing how the young folks would manage matters. "None so different, I warrant," was his self-congratulatory expression, adding confidentially, "Phyllis is the wife's right hand;" the person who was to be mistress in place of Lettice Barton being thus clearly signified.

Now, surely, the near approach of their felicity should have made Phyllis and Leonard very happy. But no. They seemed by mutual consent to avoid each other; or if by chance they were thrown together, Phyllis was silent and Leonard was embarrassed. There had been a time when the day was not long enough for all they had to talk about. But that time was apparently forgotten by Leonard,

while bitterly did Phyllis recall the memory of a joy departed for ever. And even now, although it is the night of Leonard's birthday party, and she is standing in her own little room, contemplating a beautifully-worked muslin dress, such as Lady Grace might envy, the tears fill her eyes. At length she buries her face in her hands, and gives vent to the grief which has all day long been lying heavily at her heart. What could be the reason of Leonard's altered manner towards her? For the last two months he had been like a different being. They had had no quarrel of any kind, but suddenly he seemed to grow cold and indifferent; then had come, on his part, bursts of tenderness such as she had never seen before. And these outbreaks would be followed by fits of gloom and irritability, and then he would go out and remain until very late, and next morning be distant and silent, and try to avoid her in every way. Where could he go? He was always leaving about eight and never returning until past twelve or one o'clock. If it was, as he said, to have a rubber with some men, why did he take such pains to look his best? It could never be for men that he was always putting on new neckties, and speaking sharply if his shirts were not got up to his liking.

Without any acknowledged engagement between Phyllis and Leonard, they had drifted into looking upon each other in the same light as everybody else looked upon them, that is, as affianced man and wife, and until this doubt had crept in Phyllis, in the contentment of perfect happiness, had never asked herself what Leonard was to her. But now she put the question to her heart, and it answered—her life, her hope, the one man she had ever loved, or ever could love. And what if he had ceased to care for her, and she had lost him! “Oh! no! no!” she cried aloud in her misery, as she sank down and prayed that, no matter what she might suffer, what troubles and trials she might have to bear, she might still keep Leonard’s love and become his wife. Then, hearing the clock strike eight, and the drawing on of the shutters preparatory to closing, she rose hastily, bathed her face, and ran down-stairs to superintend the lighting-up of the dancing-room and the final adjustment of the decorations, because, as her aunt declared, “the young men could never be satisfied things were right unless Phyllis was head and chief.” This was true, for from the grey-headed managing-man, with a wife and five children, down to old deaf Dick, the cellarman, they were all Phyllis’s devoted slaves,

“How it all happened,” etc. I.

challenging any one to name a fairer beauty, and proclaiming her gentleness and goodness whenever a chance presented itself. Had her intended husband been any other than Leonard, though he might be heir to all the estates around, they would have unanimously declared him unworthy of a bride about whom each told some tale of gentle thought and womanly tenderness.

But Leonard in their esteem ranked with Phyllis; so the men who envied him only equalled their women folk, who envied her, and they had both in the end to rejoice that fate had decided that this perfect pair should mate together.

If on this day poor Phyllis's heart had been sore and heavy, she had not been the only one to suffer. Leonard, on his part, had not known one minute's peace, and he gave a sigh of relief when he found himself alone and able to look as dejected and miserable as he felt. "What can I do?" he muttered half aloud. "I never will go through such another day, I am determined. While people were congratulating me, I felt and looked like a culprit. And why? Because I cannot accept the wife my father has provided for me? Is that a crime? Is a man to hang his head, and be ashamed to look up, because he finds it impossible to control his feelings and

affections? Of course, when I knew no better, I fancied I loved Phyllis; but now I would not, I could not, marry her. And she? I know she *thinks* she cares for me, but that is not love. It would be impossible for a nature like Phyllis's to feel for any man what Norah feels for me. She would be a little low-spirited for a day or two, and then she'd remember the cabbages wanted pickling, the jam wanted re-boiling, and her domestic duties would greatly counteract any grief she might feel; but Norah would break her heart. She says if she thought the man she gave her love to did not return it, she should die—the very idea would kill her. My father and mother must love her. She would win any person's love, only I cannot bear to disappoint the dear old souls, whose hearts are set upon having Phyllis for a daughter. How I wish I had not let it go on so long! I never suspected that the old man had talked so openly of giving up the business; but I won't dance with Phyllis—people shan't say I deceived them that far, and she's sure to get plenty of partners. I suppose I *have* kept other fellows away from her. Well, they can come forward now; she will get a better match than I, for of course she'll marry; at least, I wish her to."

Now Leonard was deceiving himself, as he had

been doing ever since the little oldfashioned theatre opened for the winter season with several distinguished stars from London, and among them Miss Norah Churchill. Of course, he went, with all the other young men, to see the fascinating actress, who, as report said, had driven all the young aristocrats in London to desperation. And though it seemed wonderful that one so sought after should consent to leave all this homage in order that she might charm the humbler *habitués* of a country theatre, very soon the most sceptical believed the tale; for whether in tragedy, comedy, or burlesque, Miss Norah was equally attractive.

The very first night Leonard went to the theatre Dick Tatton declared she never took her eyes off him; and though Leonard laughed at Dick for being such a fool as to say so, yet he went the next night, and the next, until some one offered to introduce him. The result was that he forgot his father and mother's wishes, forgot Phyllis even, and was resolved, whatever came, if his idol would but condescend to accept him, that she should become his wife, and reign queen at the Golden Canister. While he was with his enslaver, the task seemed easy enough; but when absent from her, he decidedly felt his courage fail every time he wanted to tell his parents

that he found he could no longer love Phyllis sufficiently to make her his wife, and that his choice had fallen upon another. And when they would ask him who that other was, what could he say? Ah! that was the true secret which tied Leonard's tongue; for Luke Barton and his wife were proud folk, and held strong prejudices against every girl who was not hedged in by watchful relations and proprieties, such as befitted the maidenly state. All those who exhibited their charms publicly for gain, they sweepingly placed under one category, whether the boards they trod belonged to the opera-house of a city or the booth of a country fair. And if they ever spoke of these beings, who had almost a different nature from their own, it was with a pity more akin to scorn than to love. The task was thus no easy one, and most men would have shrunk before they communicated a fact which Leonard knew would embitter his parents' old age. At first Phyllis had been his principal obstacle; how should he tell her? how would she take it? But while he was considering these things Phyllis had grown silent and distant, and had latterly avoided him. It was evident that she had never cared for him, so that made one part of the business easier. However, it was no use bothering his head any more. Tell them

he must, for the company of the Theatre Royal had left for a neighbouring town, and Norah had written, giving Leonard a full description of the reception she had met with from the officers quartered there. So now there was added to Leonard's other distractions the fear lest some rival should steal this jewel, which he felt all the world must be, like himself, longing to possess.

While Leonard, thus worried and perplexed, is obliged to go down-stairs, and try to wear a pleasant smile on his face, and listen to the good wishes and *mal à propos* congratulations of the fast-arriving guests, let us say a few words about the cause of his distraction, Norah Churchill. Her real name was Eleanor Church, but from her childhood she had been taught that the less she had to say about the realities of her life the better. Mrs Churchill had talked so much and so frequently before her daughter of their better days, when they mixed with the proudest of the land, that Norah tried to believe that something of the kind must have existed before her wretched childhood began, since which time they had had no certain means of subsistence. During the last few years they had been much better off, but it was all through Norah's exertions. She was quick and clever, and though perhaps never

likely to make a name in the theatrical world, she was almost certain, as long as her pretty face and piquant manner lasted, to be able to make enough to support herself and her mother. Before these charms failed she hoped to secure an eligible marriage.

For Leonard Barton she cared nothing except in so far as all admiration gratified her; but Mrs Churchill warmly advocated the cause of the first man who had ever offered anything when he had anything to offer. She accordingly urged Norah to consider whether she had not better secure this chance. The Bartons, she heard, were very wealthy people, and Leonard an only son. But Norah was not anxious to seal her fate. She laughed at the prospect of settling down in a remote country town, with what she termed a good-looking bumpkin, and said that some much more tempting bait must be offered before she consented to forego the charms of her profession. Mrs Churchill, however, was not so certain about the policy of giving up this substance for a shadow, and she felt that at least it would be prudent to hold him on for a time. So it was the mother who managed that Leonard should never leave without an engagement to come again: it was she who told him of the splendid offers Norah had received, and hinted at the change which

lately she had observed in the dear girl's spirits. All very wrong, no doubt, but Mrs Churchill only did what many a woman with far less excuse often tries to do. She strove to secure a comfortable home and well-to-do husband for her daughter, although she knew well that her heart was not in his keeping. Thirty years of shift, deceit, poverty, and debt tend to make people somewhat hazy in their notions of individual right and wrong. As long as Norah's welfare was secured, Leonard's happiness was a very secondary consideration to Mrs Churchill.

So it happened that while Luke and Lettice Barton were making plans to surprise their son by giving up to him the entire charge and unreserved profits of the Golden Canister, and while Phyllis was trying to keep down her bitter tears at her lover's altered manner, and Leonard was annoyed and irritated because people would keep congratulating him on an event which he had decided should never take place, Mrs Churchill was inducing Norah to write to Leonard in the hope that jealousy would induce him to propose an immediate marriage, in which case she might talk her daughter into accepting the offer. She was vexed with Norah for laughing at poor Leonard's passionate declarations, and soundly rated her for making fun of him before

her new admirer, Captain Sutherland. But the sermonizing had little effect upon Norah, who wrote the letter, and meeting the gallant captain on her way to post it, displayed to his view the bulky epistle, calling it a "sugary sop" for "Figs," by which name she distinguished Leonard among her more aristocratic admirers.

But all this is unknown to Leonard, who on the evening of the dance feels almost jealous of the admiration pale Phyllis is attracting, thinking how far outshone she and all the pretty girls there would be if his bright-eyed, captivating Norah were present.

The music strikes up, the dancing begins, Leonard choosing for his partner the eldest Miss Tatton. Phyllis waited until then, and after that Leonard had no more embarrassment, for before each dance ended she had provided a partner for the next, so that supper-time arrived, and not once had the two spoken to each other.

In the excitement nobody present noticed it, or, if they did, they fancied that this had been arranged between them. At eleven o'clock it was the custom to have "The Triumph," led off by Luke Barton and his wife, and as each couple there were secure of sitting together at supper, the engagements for this dance were generally made very early in the

evening. No man thought of asking Phyllis; of course, she and Leonard would go in together, as they had always done. So the tune began and the places were taken, and Leonard lingered, not knowing what to do. He saw that no one else intended to claim Phyllis, yet this was the very dance he had most wished to avoid. However, it was of no use hesitating—they were nearly the last couple left. So he walked up to Phyllis, whose face had a brighter colour in it, and whose eyes sparkled more than he had ever seen them do before, as he said to her,—

“Phyllis, will you dance with me?”

“No, Leonard,” she replied.

Could that be Phyllis speaking so harshly and looking so defiantly at him? was the thought that flashed across him.

“Come, come, you two,” called out Luke from the end of the room. “You need not be keeping everybody waiting now. I’ll warrant you’ll have plenty of time together in the next fifty years for all you’ve got to say.”

“I think we had best dance together, Phyllis,” said Leonard. “I don’t wish to hurt my father and mother to-night.” Phyllis rose reluctantly.

“I’m sorry to force myself on you,” continued

Leonard, more nettled by Phyllis's indifference than he cared to own.

"I am sorry you should have any occasion to," returned Phyllis, her gentle nature fairly roused. "It is quite time uncle and aunt should be told how they annoy us by coupling our names together."

Leonard had no time to reply to this, or he would have liked to return a bitter answer; for though he had been daily longing for some word which should give him reason to say to his parents that Phyllis and he had agreed that a marriage between them would not give happiness to either, he felt quite injured and angry now that she had said something to this effect. But why? Simply because Leonard Barton had always been the darling, the idol of his father and mother, and of the whole household of the Golden Canister. Every one of them gave up to his wishes, and indulged his slightest whim. Until the present time he scarcely knew what it was to have an ungratified wish. No one thwarted him; no one opposed him, everybody lauded his generosity and his sweet disposition—two qualities often found in those who have their entire will in everything. Not that Leonard was unamiable. On the contrary, his disposition was excellent. But he needed a great deal of wholesome disappointment,

and roughing with people who did not care for him nor his feelings, before he could reach anything like the standard of even common every-day perfection. He loved Phyllis and his father and mother dearly, but to give up anything he had set his heart upon for their sakes never entered his mind. Up to the time he met Norah Churchill, he was content to accept Phyllis's love, to bestow an occasional caress upon her, and to talk all day of himself and his plans to the most patient listener man ever had.

Norah soon saw through him, and by playing with his selfishness and vanity, secured to herself a thorough slave, to whom her every caprice was law, to whom a frown was misery, and an endearment a feverish excitement too uncertain to be called happiness. She used to declare—

“If the boy had not been spoiled he would be perfect, his real nature is so good as often to put mine to the blush for the artifices and deceitful make-believes I must be up to. I shall never get any one more useful in practising my parts with,” she would laughingly say, “and if I had but an audience when I am playing love-making with him, what a *furor* I should create!”

And it was for this woman that Leonard Barton cut his old father and mother to the heart, made

the girl whose very light of life he seemed to have become, pray to God to let her die rather than endure the misery of knowing that the love she had so long looked upon as her own was given to another.

The scene took place early on the morning of the following day, and a stormy one it was, for Luke Barton was not a man to be trifled with, and after bitterly reproaching Leonard he declared that no painted Jezebel (as in his hot wrath he called his son's enslaver) should ever disgrace the honest name of Barton. Then Leonard blazed up, saying that his father might reproach him as he liked, but that not even his father should in his hearing utter a word against her. He defied him or the whole world to prevent his marrying a girl who, no one could say, was less pure and good than his own mother. When further on Luke declared that Phyllis had been deceived and insulted, and that therefore Leonard must make her his wife, the young man took a bitter oath that to his dying day he would never ask Phyllis to marry him.

So all at once a great cloud seemed to have settled over the happy household. The servants went about silent, and hushed their mirth, because something (they knew not what) had gone wrong

with master and mistress. Leonard, without a word, saddled his horse and went off, not to return until late in the day. Luke paced the room in gloomy reverie, while his wife watched him terrified and oppressed with fear for him, for her boy, and for Phyllis, who, locked into her little chamber, shed tears of grief and despair.

Towards evening Luke went to his niece and said—

“Phyllis, though in name you may never be my daughter, you are and ever will be that in my heart: tell me openly, child, your wishes, and how best I can try to comfort you.”

Then Phyllis sunk down by the old man’s side and sobbed out—

“By not being hard against *him*, uncle, and not letting us be much talked about.”

At first Luke would not listen, and poured forth many a violent threat against Leonard, but in the end he became softened, loving Phyllis none the less, for every excuse she offered found an echo in his own heart. His pride understood hers, and rebelled sorely against their being made the subject of a nine days’ gossip. Lettice was called in, and it was decided that she should take Phyllis to the house of a distant relative, where she could remain until matters were more settled.

II.

FORTUNATELY, in some cases, we little know what our neighbours think and say of us, else we should be much surprised to find that many of those "household skeletons" which we have covered up carefully, and locked up almost in our own breasts, are dragged out and flaunted at the mere mention of our names. It is only at the near approach of ourselves, or one of our family, that the voices are hushed which were crying shame, or woe, or wonder, and, say they with a pitying smile, "The poor things fancy no one knows anything of the matter but themselves."

So Luke Barton hugged the idea that he had completely cheated the whole town, when he told them that he did not think, after all, that he should give up just yet; that Leonard wanted to see a little more of the world before he settled down; and that as the Golden Canister was but a dull place for a young girl, he had sent Phyllis off on a visit. The old man plumed himself on the cleverness and tact which had prevented people from asking him awkward questions. Every night he and his wife congratulated each other on the wonderful way in which

they had escaped being made the talk of the place. Surely it was a merciful kindness that blinded the good old couple to the fact that the whole circumstances were in every person's mouth for miles round, that half the people came to see how Luke took it, and that no word was thought too bitter for Leonard, who could try to disgrace his family, and break the heart of a girl whom a duke might have been proud to marry, and this too for a horrid designing creature, all paint and acting, who openly laughed at him and his infatuation to his very companions.

There was one hope for Leonard: if he heard how Norah was going on at Stradbroke it must certainly cure him. Somebody ought to tell him; but, then, where was that somebody to be found? Though all knew the cause of Leonard's altered looks and moody manner, they only suggested to him that perhaps he was out of sorts, or wanted a change. Leonard, on the other hand, was too much taken up with his own feelings to think much about people's opinions, or to notice the care-worn, anxious looks of his father and mother—the result of all the heart-aches they had lately endured for his sake. Lettice missed Phyllis a hundred times in an hour, and bemoaned her dear one's absence; she pictured her trying in her own brave way to put on a bright

face to deceive the friend she was living with into writing that Phyllis was quite herself again. Yes, Lettice knew the misery the girl was enduring. She understood the agony that made her ask in the first outbreak of her trouble if people did not die of a broken heart. Then Leonard was a constant source of uneasiness. The way he avoided being alone with her or with his father, his moody manner, and added to all this, the gloom which seemed to have fallen over the whole house, was full of depressing influence. Luke now was often sharp and angry with his assistants for things he would not have noticed before, and everything seemed to go wrong with everybody at the Golden Canister.

It was not altogether selfishness which made Leonard so unmindful of his parents. The poor fellow really had a sorry time of it. Stradbroke was forty miles distant, and a difficult place to get at, and he had only seen Norah twice. Though she had been very kind to him, he had found her each time surrounded by admirers, and this made him miserable with jealousy. Then she evidently did not want him to come to her often, and each time that he proposed to pay her another visit she put a dozen obstacles in the way of it. Her letters, too, were short, and she declared that she was so busy

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studying her parts that she had not time to write often. Leonard was thus kept in a fever of expectation, suspense, and disappointment. At length, after an unusually long interval, came a letter, saying that her engagement at Stradbrook having come to an end, an advantageous offer had been made to her from a manager at Edinburgh, which she had accepted. She was now in that city, preparing for a new series of triumphs. Then followed desperate regret at not seeing him before she left—a little melodramatic fear that he would soon cease to love her, mixed up with a great deal of romantic tenderness, ending with a covert hint that she had heard he was in a way engaged to another, and therefore no doubt he would soon forget “his own Norah.”

Poor Leonard! he was nearly beside himself. Why had she gone without telling him, without seeing him? Oh! she was cruel, heartless. Then he read the letter again, and wondered what she did mean. Perhaps she was jealous. She had heard something of Phyllis, and her love could not bear it. What could it be? who could have been talking about him to her? Ah, he knew it must have been Dick Tatton. He had said he was going to Stradbrook. He would go and fathom this, and Dick should be made to confess that he had been saying

what was not true. So he sat down and scribbled off pages of reproach and love, vowing that, whatever came, she would all his life be the same to him, "his own Norah." She had never written that before—it almost compensated for her leaving. Still, he would have it out with that fool, Dick Tatton, and teach him not to meddle in other people's business, and off he went to find him. Now, Dick Tatton had been from a boy a devoted admirer of Phyllis. So he was not over-fond of Leonard, and was not likely to miss an opportunity of paying off some of his own wrongs upon his rival.

"Yes," he said, "I have been to Stradbroke, and I have seen Miss Churchill."

Then it was as Leonard supposed, and Dick was the culprit; so, acting upon this idea, Leonard gave full rein to his tongue. Dick listened silently till Leonard had finished, and then he gave him the full benefit of the reports as to the way in which Miss Churchill was going on at Stradbroke; how she amused her admirers there by recounting the speeches and gestures of the ardent lover she had left behind, until he was a by-word among the officers, one of whom had asked Norah in a loud whisper, meant for Dick's ear, whether that was "Figs's friend."

Leonard was speechless with rage, and Dick continued:—

“Why, while she was here everybody knew that she was only carrying on a game with you. When you weren’t there, Lester Blake was, and she used to write him the most spoony letters. He showed me one where she said how awfully you’d bored her the night before, and how she wished he’d been you.”

“It’s a lie, from beginning to end!” roared Leonard. “Some infernal plot you’ve hatched amongst you because she wouldn’t take any notice of you fellows.”

“Just as you like,” replied Dick, calmly. “What you choose to think about her you may; only don’t you accuse me of naming your cousin to her. I wouldn’t so far insult either of them.”

“Insult them! What do you mean?” exclaimed Leonard.

“Why, I mean this,” replied Dick, preparing to leave, “that I should insult Phyllis Barton by speaking of her to Norah Churchill, and I should insult Miss Churchill by making her see the difference which, as I consider, lies between her and Miss Barton.”

And before Leonard had time to say another

word, Dick had turned, and was walking off in the opposite direction, leaving him to go home in a state of frenzy.

This seemed the climax of all his sufferings; for though he declared he did not believe a syllable of what Dick had said about Lester Blake, nor about the men at Stradbroke, he could not help asking himself, what if it should be true? At any rate he must put an end to the agony he was suffering.

He ended his reflections by walking suddenly up to his father and asking him for a few minutes' conversation. In about a couple of hours after, when they came out of the room, they both looked pale and dejected. Luke had his arm through his son's. Love for Leonard had gained the victory over Phyllis and family pride, and Luke Barton had given his consent to his son asking Miss Churchill to lay aside her Thespian arts, to retire into private life, and to sit down quietly and spend her future days as the wife of the wealthiest tradesman in a country town, and to enjoy all the honour of being mistress of the Golden Canister.

It was a hard blow for Luke, but he and Lettice agreed that it was of no use to wreck the entire happiness of their lives. Perhaps they had been too proud, and had thought that things were to go on

smoothly with them for ever. Now they must try and like this—this young lady—whom Leonard ranked before every one else in the world.

So, without a line to apprise Norah of his visit, Leonard started for Edinburgh, with his parents' consent to his making her his wife, and the promise of an income sufficient to keep them in ease and comfort.

Lettice, when she bade Leonard good-bye, sent her love to Norah, and trusted God would bless them both; and Luke wished his boy every happiness, and hoped that the wife he had chosen would repay his love by her goodness. Then, when they were left alone, they took tearful counsel how they should tell all this to Phyllis. They knew quite well that, though in every letter she had earnestly pleaded for their consent to Leonard's choice, when the certainty came that all her hope was dead for ever, it must tear open her wounds afresh.

How much Phyllis really suffered none ever knew. Her comfort was that she was far away from loving hearts whose sympathy she could not have borne, and from anxious eyes whose scrutiny she could not have deceived. She bore her grief unaided by human help, and tried to summon up all her better nature to convince herself that she must submit,

that a higher will than hers had decreed it. Lettice cried bitterly over the letter the girl sent to them with its enclosure to Leonard; and Luke was not ashamed that his eyes were blinded, and his voice too choked to read the words his brother's child had written to those from whom she seemed so cruelly separated.

Arrived at Edinburgh, Leonard could not feel pleased at the reception he met with from Norah. She tried to be the same to him, but he felt he was boring her now. She never would have written that last letter to him, but that she supposed they should not meet again, and to use her own words, she intended "letting the boy easily down." This coming to Edinburgh after her was too much of a good thing. She hated telling people unpleasant truths, but if Leonard was to go on in this way she should be forced to do so; the worst of people like him was that they always thought you meant everything.

Even Mrs Churchill no longer advocated "young Barton's" cause. A richer suitor for her daughter's favour had entirely changed the current of that practical woman's ideas. She now advised Norah to put an end to his nonsense by telling him that it was like his impertinence to suppose a lady of

her talent and family, and the daughter of a colonel (which was the last rank she had hit upon for the departed Church), would condescend to such as him. But Norah had no idea of disgusting an admirer, and she needed no maternal counsel to get rid of a tiresome lover. Accordingly, when in the morning Leonard came at the hour she had appointed, he was received very much as usual. When, however, after a passionate declaration of his love, he hid his face in her lap, and told her how, before he had seen her, he had thought he could please his father and mother by marrying his cousin, but that now there was not a woman on earth he would look at but herself, and that he had told his father so, getting his consent and his promise of an income sufficient for him to give his bride a comfortable home, Norah felt she could not help caressing him for so bountifully administering to her vanity. So she told him how dearly she loved him, what happiness it would be for her to live in some sweet secluded cottage where they might be all the world to one another; but—and as fast as Leonard combated one “but” Norah began another charming sentence, finishing a more incontestable “but,” until Leonard, driven to desperation, seized her hands saying, “Norah, don’t give me any more arguments

or reasonings: kill me at once, or bid me live, by saying Yes or No to my question." Norah, seeing that it was useless to beat about the bush any longer, and knowing that her richer suitor was due in half-an-hour, gave a despairing look into his face, then cast her eyes down after her approved manner on the stage, as if she were resolved upon breaking her own heart, and answered "No." Leonard called her heartless and cruel, and heaped reproaches upon her, upbraiding her for deceiving him, until, in order to get rid of him, she had to blaze up in her turn, and dare him ever to come into her presence again.

"You shall be obeyed," cried poor Leonard; "I will leave Edinburgh this very night, praying I may never hear your name again."

Norah did not believe him, but Leonard went. He did not go home, however; he could not do that, but he went as far as Carlisle, because nobody knew him there. He wandered about the walls of the old place, not battling against the demons that strove together within him, but rather giving way to them, until he could stay away from the cause of his misery no longer. Perhaps she was suffering as he was now that they were parted. Had she not told him a hundred times that she loved him more than any other man? Oh! she would repent;

her profession might be dear to her, but not as dear as he was; and if it was, he would tell her she should continue on the stage, only she must marry him.

So back to Edinburgh he went. The porter at the hotel gave him a couple of letters from home. These he put into his pocket; he could not read them. What did he care for home then, or for anybody but her whose name flared before him on great red and yellow posters—“Miss Norah Churchill in ‘The Love Chase.’ Constance—Miss Norah Churchill.”

Tired as he was, he wouldn't wait for dinner. How soon he could see his Circe was the absorbing idea; and he at once made for the theatre. The performance had commenced; Norah was on the stage, looking, Leonard thought, more bewitching than ever, and casting continual glances at a part of the house where sat an elderly gentleman, who seemed utterly regardless of the attention his loud applauses were attracting. Leonard screened himself as well as he could, that Norah might not see him. He jealously watched the two, till at last, between the acts, he went out and asked the box-keeper if he knew who that gentleman was, indicating the place he occupied.

"He?" said the man; "oh, that's Mr Ainslie; he's after Miss Churchill; they do say he's going to marry her, but so I've heard of a good many before."

Leonard did not stop to hear more. He rushed off determined, as the piece was nearly over, to go to her lodgings and wait and see her once more, and hear from her own lips the truth of this report.

Mrs Churchill was in, the servant said; and, remembering how kind she had always been to him, he determined to interest her in his behalf. But, to his great surprise, Mrs Churchill's greeting was:

"Now, Mr Barton, I hope you ain't come to bother Norah, because she's had enough of your nonsense."

Leonard tried to stammer out some reply to this unlooked-for speech.

"I dare say you mean well, and we've always treated you as a gentleman, but you can't think that I ever supposed you expected Miss Churchill would marry you."

"Why," replied Leonard, aghast, "you told me yourself you hoped she would."

"Bless the man, what will he say next!" exclaimed Mrs Churchill, with well-feigned indignation. "Why, Mr Barton, you must be mad to say such

a thing. Without wishing to hurt your feelings, I must say I have much higher expectations for my daughter than anything you could offer her. I may as well be plain with you, and tell you that she will very shortly be married to a gentleman who has his thousands a-year and keeps his carriage, and who will restore her to the position which she was born to, only her dear papa's unfortunate death obliged us for a time to forego it."

"I don't, I won't believe it!" groaned poor Leonard. "You are forcing her into it; you are deceiving me; it's false, I feel it is!"

"Well, I'm sure, that's pretty well," returned Mrs Churchill, nettled by the doubt she considered thrown upon her assertions. "I could show you a note of his, in which he tells her of his always thinking about her, morning, noon, and night; and asks her if she's heard anything of young Spoony, meaning you, yet."

"Then, in mercy's name, show it to me, Mrs Churchill, and I will swear never to come near her again."

Mrs Churchill hesitated: supposing Mr Ainslie should come home with Norah, and should meet this desperate young man—for she could see he

was desperate—a pretty fuss there'd be; so she asked him—

“Well, would you go as soon as you'd read it?”

“Yes.”

“And not come back or be hanging about Norah again?”

“Yes.”

Mrs Churchill went to a box and took out a letter, which she watched Leonard reading, without a word of comment; she saw him fold it up and put it into his pocket.

“Oh! but, Mr Barton, you must not keep it; what should I say to Norah?”

But Leonard paid no attention. He did not seem to see or hear her, as he mechanically looked round for his hat, put it on, and walked out of the room. Vainly did Mrs Churchill follow him, call to him, run to the door after him. Leonard paid not the smallest heed to her or anybody else until he crossed into the next street, where he ran almost against Norah, hanging upon Mr Ainslie's arm, and smiling up into his face. Then a great rush of bitter hatred came into his heart, and as he passed her he hissed out the words that rose to his lips. Mr Ainslie said to Norah, “Did that man speak to you?”

Norah, all surprised as she was, had to steady her voice to answer, "No."

And so Leonard Barton's eyes were opened to the fact that he had been duped, cheated, laughed at,—his devotion made the subject of merriment, and his love the scoff of Miss Churchill's numerous followers. This last thought, more effectually than anything else, quenched his passion, for no man's affection can continue for a woman who holds him up to ridicule. Leonard hated her; loathed himself for having forgotten every other tie for her, and felt that he could not return home and face the pity of his father and mother, and the sneers and laughter of his friends. He longed to be amongst strangers, people who knew nothing of him and his story. He wrote an incoherent scribble to his father, saying that he was not going to marry Miss Churchill,—the reason why he could not explain to them. He should not return home, and they could not wish the return of one who had proved himself so unmindful of their love. He intended to get something to do by which he might earn some money and no longer be a burden to them. He would write from time to time, so that they must not be anxious on his account. All this was mixed up with reproaches upon himself for what

had passed, despair for the future, and a general tone of not-caring-what-became-of-him, which filled Luke and Lettice with the most distracting fears. They wrote by return of post, urgently entreating him to come back; but there came no answer, until the poor mother was nearly beside herself with the agony of picturing the horrors that might have happened to her darling.

Phyllis returned home. All pride was laid aside, and not a single person in the town but sympathized in the distress at the Golden Canister. Everybody wrote to everybody at a distance, giving a full and particular description of Leonard Barton, and telling of his being absent, and urging that, if he should be met with, he should be told that the old people were breaking their hearts on his account, and that his mother would surely die.

Three months went by, and then came a letter saying that Leonard was in London. He was quite well now, but he had been ill, or he would have written before. He was longing to hear from home; if they had not quite forgotten their ungrateful son, would they send a line to "Leonard B., Charing Cross Post-office?"

Send a line to him! why, they would all have sent themselves to urge him to return, and to tell

him how dearly they loved him, and how his only fault had been in staying away. Luke, without saying a word, enclosed a cheque in his letter, and Lettice put a five-pound note in hers, fearing that he might be pushed for money. Then Luke wondered whether he had a situation, and Lettice wondered what had been the matter with him, and their thankful hearts, rejoicing over their dear one's safety, forgot the misery his absence had caused them, and earnestly hoped that he would listen to their entreaties, and return home to them again.

And Leonard, not in the spirit of listening to their entreaties, but with great thankfulness that he had still that dear spot to go back to, returned—but returned so altered externally that when his father and mother saw him they could not believe that the wan invalid, feebly trying to hasten towards them, could be their Leonard; that the shaven head, sunken eyes, and thin limbs that tottered under him could belong to their once so handsome, stalwart son. Oh, what had caused this change? A fever, Leonard said; but he did not tell them then, nor for long afterwards, all the sufferings he had endured: how, after he left Edinburgh, he had gone straight to London, proposing to live upon the money he had with him until he should obtain

some situation—a comparatively easy task he, in his country ignorance, thought: but week after week passed by, and he had met with nothing but disappointments. Pride forbade him writing home and asking for more money; so he denied himself everything he possibly could, until he half-starved himself. This together with his excited state of mind and anxiety, reduced his bodily condition; one neglected cold upon another ended at length in feverish symptoms, to which he would not yield, But at length he was beyond speaking or moving, or making any resistance to the landlady's taking him (for want of knowing what better to do with him) to the nearest hospital. There was nothing to show to whom he belonged. Before evening he was in a state of delirium. And so the petted darling of Luke and Lettice Barton, the pride of the Golden Canister, and the man who filled fair Phyllis's heart with despairing love, lay struggling for life in the bed of a hospital ward, attended by hired nurses, who wondered if he had any belongings, and, if so, how they could thus leave the poor fellow to strangers.

When he was recovering Leonard's pride rebelled against his asking any one about the hospital to write to his parents, fearing that it might in some

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way get to the ears of his native town. The day he wrote his letter home was the day he was discharged, still miserably weak and nervous, and with only a few shillings in his pocket.

Well might the tears, which none of them pretended to notice, steal down his thin cheeks as he found himself once more surrounded by the atmosphere of love, and well might his heart send up a thanksgiving for that love upon which only a short time before he had set so little store.

Leonard was a long time in getting well, and had he been a hero suffering from wounds gained in some glorious cause, Lettice and Phyllis could not have made more fuss over him. He had been ill once before, and the two women often spoke together of the difference that had come over him.

Hard experience had taught Leonard the true value of great, unselfish love. Daily now he thanked God for the blessings he had before taken as his right. He thought now how little he had appreciated the devotion of his father and mother, and how utterly unworthy he had been of it and of the love of Phyllis—his dear cousin—yes, she would never be anything but his cousin now. He could see the alteration in her manner; she was kind and forbearing to him, but in her heart she despised him. And

no wonder; for what a blind idiot he had been! He had always thought her pretty, but now he could watch her by the hour, and would often pretend to be asleep that she might occupy herself so fully as not to observe his fixed gaze. He had never noticed how other men admired her, but now he firmly believed that all the friends who came to see him were secretly in love with her. He could hardly help pushing her away when she would at night put her lips to his forehead, saying, "Good-night, dear cousin." She had never offered him such a salutation in days gone by, and had never called him cousin—a name she was always thrusting upon him now.

So Leonard was vexed and tormented, while Phyllis daily schooled herself by saying that Leonard was getting stronger, and that in time he would choose a wife whom she would love as a sister; and that when her uncle and aunt were dead, and she was no more wanted about the old place, she must try and do some good in the world, and not sink into a complaining old maid. The thought of ever marrying any one else never occurred to her now. She had given Leonard all her love, and she had none left for any other man.

III.

By the time the first June roses came, Leonard was strong and well again. But he was so altered and sobered—so much more anxious to save his father any care, so tenderly watchful over every want his mother had, that everybody felt the difference. The slightly overbearing tone was gone. He no more chafed under the slightest contradiction, and though this alteration endeared him to all he came in contact with, those who loved him most would willingly have suffered from his old manner, rather than see a change which they feared was the result of disappointed hopes and a broken spirit.

Phyllis used to think his diffidence and constraint to her resulted from the fear lest she might not understand that they could never occupy the old footing towards each other. So to put him at his ease, and because a little sore pride would rise up in her heart, she used to take particular notice of Dick Tatton, and receive all his attentions, thereby driving Leonard to further despair, for, inconsistent as it seemed, Leonard was now thoroughly in love with the girl whom he had sworn he would never ask to be his wife. Daily he contrasted her with

Norah Churchill, and asked himself what demon had possessed him to throw away his life's happiness. Oh! it was all over for ever. Phyllis must see what he felt for her, and her pointed acceptance of Dick Tatton's attentions was intended to rebuke his presumption in daring now to think of her.

The summer roses bloomed and faded, and the golden corn ripened and was cut down, the leaves that were budding when Leonard Barton returned home began to fall and wither, as his hopes seemed to do day by day, until he could endure his state no longer. One day when Lettice, with loving solicitude, had been trying to dispel his depression, she summoned up courage enough to speak of Norah. Leonard broke out in a storm of rage at her name, cursing the day he first saw her, and calling himself a dolt and an idiot, until it dawned upon Lettice that her prayer had been answered, and that Leonard loved Phyllis again. But nothing would induce him to speak to her. He was certain she intended marrying Dick Tatton. Why, she loved the man, and showed that she did—he saw it; of course she couldn't deceive him.

For a whole week Lettice pondered over what she had best do. In her heart she believed that Phyllis loved Leonard. Still appearances were in

favour of Dick Tatton, and at last she resolved to sound her niece, who at once told her that Dick had had his answer long ago. Only they agreed that, as neither of them ever intended to marry, they should be great friends all their lives. This was good news, indeed; but when Lettice went on to speak of Leonard, Phyllis would not listen. No, whatever *he* said was not from love, but from pity. She would go away in order that Leonard might feel himself free to choose a suitable wife, which fear of disappointing them alone prevented him from doing. Lettice was in despair. How could she bring these two together? At length, Phyllis said, "There is but one way in which I could be convinced. Let me overhear you tell this to Leonard, aunt; and give me your sacred promise that he shall not know I am in the room. It seems a dishonourable plan, but as the happiness of two lives is at stake it may be forgiven."

So Lettice promised, and the next evening the scheme was carried out. Phyllis, hidden from sight by the curtains, and seated upon the deep old-fashioned window-seat of her aunt's room, listened with excited fear to the conversation which now seemed the turning-point in her existence.

Lettice told her son of Phyllis's refusal of Dick

Tatton's offer, and that now he might surely take courage to speak to her. But no, Leonard was all despair. He knew, he was sure, that Phyllis cared for Dick, only she was unselfish, that rather than pain her uncle and aunt, perhaps him too—for of course she must see how he loved her now,—she would sacrifice herself.

"But she shan't do that, mother," he broke out. "She shall see I am not the selfish fellow I was. I will go away for a time, and then she'll be different, and when she is, I shall try and come back again."

"But, my dear," said Lettice pettishly, "you are talking nonsense. Phyllis as much as told me she still loved you."

"Yes, mother; and do you think if she really did love me she would have told you? Never. No, mother, I threw the chance away when I might have had it. I did not think her anything in comparison with a woman whose business it was to cheat; and now my punishment is to value what I have cast away, and to feel I am eating my heart out for love of the girl whom I swore in my madness never to ask to be my wife." And Leonard, in his misery, bowed his head upon the table, and hid his face.

Then Lettice stole quietly out of the room, and

Leonard felt a soft cheek pressed against his hand, and looking up his eyes met Phyllis's, who said with trembling voice—

“Then Leonard, must I ask you to take me?”

Let us leave them there, while we shake our heads pityingly over Phyllis's want of proper pride.

“Fancy!” says some fair girl, who reigns supreme over her slaves; “after a man had treated you like that, *asking* him to marry you!”

“A mean-spirited creature, and highly improper!” exclaims the strong-minded young lady, living in an atmosphere far above love and its joys and sorrows.

“I'd have served him out!” declares the happy bride, whose word is law to a devoted husband.

Perhaps all these speak truly from their hearts,—hearts that never were tried as sorely as poor Phyllis's had been.

A due amount of proper pride, and indignation, and desire to avenge our wrongs are all very good things, and Phyllis Barton had felt all these to the full; and then she proved a truth in human nature—that all these feelings have their limits, and in time die out; but that the one love of a pure unselfish heart has no limit, and endures unto the end.

Phyllis's reward was in Leonard's life, which was devoted to her. He believed she had no equal, and declared that to her alone he owed the happiness which daily grew more perfect. Lettice and Luke seemed to grow young again in the joyful realization of their wishes. There was no further delay. Leonard and Phyllis were married as soon as it was possible, and again love, peace, and goodwill reigned at the sign of the Golden Canister.

PETER TROTMAN.

MY name is Trotman,—Mr Peter Trotman,—Peter Trotman, Esq., for my godmother, besides giving me the name of Peter at my baptism, and a silver knife, fork, and spoon during her lifetime, made me at her death her sole heir to £20,000, in token, I suppose, of the estimation in which she held a man who for forty-eight years could withstand “that wily sex,” and follow her example of remaining in single blessedness. I wonder whether the money would have been mine had she known that this single state was the result of my misfortunes, not my wishes; had she been acquainted with all the miseries I had endured, the hopes I had entertained, and the crushing disappointments I had met with, while pursuing the tender passion. Really my woes would fill a three-volume novel of the present day. Seldom, in any work of fiction, have

I come upon a hero who tried so hard to meet with a kindred spirit, and had been so doomed to see his warmest affections either nipped in the bud or crushed in maturer blossom.

It was my misfortune not merely to be an only son, but the only boy in the distinguished family of Trotman. I fear it was due to this fact that I was so unmistakably coddled. When at school, if the weather was at all doubtful, Lydia arrived with Master Peter's thick boots, cloak, and umbrella. If I attempted to run or jump, like my school-fellows, some aunt or cousin was sure to see me, and be certain that I should over-exert myself. If I showed in my temper any signs of the "old Adam," Dr Marston was sent for, and "the dear boy was feverish." If I didn't eat, my mother was in despair,—“The dear boy hadn't the slightest appetite.” If I did eat, she was sure I was far from well—I had “such an unnatural craving for food.”

I had two sisters older than myself, but Caroline and Lavinia, when girls, would never have dreamed of disputing my right to lord it over them. At home with my own family, I was certainly “monarch of all I surveyed.” But see me at a picnic, a party, or a gathering of any kind, and all the “lord of the creation” died straight out of me, leaving me

more self-conscious and bashful than the youngest miss there, Whenever I was addressed, all my colour seemed ready to mount to the roots of my hair; my arms and legs were continually in my way or in somebody else's; the girls at my approach laughed openly or covertly, as their dispositions prompted; the young men of my own age treated me with an indifference that bordered on contempt; while small fiends in jackets, numbering years from nine to thirteen, openly patronized me and announced my blushing weakness to the world. If people had let me alone, I do not know that I should have been more awkward than other young men; but I never attempted to convey a glass of wine or cup of tea to the object of my secret but ardent passion, without a warning from some *kind* voice, "Don't upset it, Peter!" "Be careful, Peter!" and straightway one half of it was on the carpet, or over my trousers! And if it chanced to be hot tea, that was surely trying enough, without the torture of hearing the girls giggle and the boys burst into a loud "Ha! ha!" How often have I returned boiling with vexation, and determined never to leave home again, never to endure the purgatory of another friendly party!

From the age of fourteen I was continually in

love, but my first serious attachment was when I was twenty, and had just entered my situation as a clerk in the Bank of England—a situation not congenial to my taste, but provided for me as being genteel and easy for a delicate constitution, although to speak the truth, I was as healthy as a farm boy. The hours, too, were regular, because it would never have done for me to be getting my dinner at all hours, for I had no appetite (I could have eaten a donkey and digested it too). The family always had united in coddling me both as a child and as a boy, and they carried it into manhood. I said my vocation did not agree with my taste. No; for in spite of my beardless face and bashful manners, I was fired with military ardour, and longed to be a “soldier bold,” who would never tire of “war’s alarms.” My delight was to read of hairbreadth escapes by “flood and field,” of corsairs and brigands; and the lovely creatures who were always devoted to these (I can now only call them ruffians) in my imagination took the form of the Matilda, Julia, Fanny, or whoever’s image at that moment filled my breast.

Years rolled on; my sisters married; my dear fond old father and mother died; my aunts and uncles dropped off; and at length I found myself

at forty-eight a very lonely old bachelor, with a feeling that I had nobody to care for, and that there was nobody to care for me,—that the attentions I received were not for myself, but on account of the £20,000 my childless old godmother had left me, and which my friends (who continually asked me to stand sponsor for their children) hoped a childless old godfather would in due time leave to them. I used to sit in my dingy old dining-room after my lonely dinner, and wonder why it had not been my fate to have a bright face opposite me. I used to think of the men I had known with wives and families; and though I was aware that several had had hard battles to fight with the world, and many a trial to undergo, I (in spite of being what they termed “a lucky dog of a bachelor with £20,000 to call his own”) would willingly have taken my share in trial and misfortune rather than have experienced the isolated feeling I carried about with me.

I began to feel that I was too old to inspire any woman with affection for me. And if at any time a nice unaffected girl showed interest in my conversation, or pleasure in my attentions, my sisters called her bold and forward, and considered it a great liberty to take with a man “of my time of

life." I often felt a little annoyed with Caroline and Lavinia for seeking to impress my age so much upon me. If I went to see either of them they would parade their solicitude and attention before everybody, until I was ungrateful enough to feel quite annoyed. From Caroline, it would be, "Peter, my dear, are your boots thick, because a cold at our time of life is serious?" Or from Lavinia, as she brought out a great piece of cotton wool, "Now, Peter, stuff your ears; we are none of us getting younger, my dear, and deafness comes on very suddenly at our time of life." If I had a pain anywhere, it was the gout flying about me, and though I was as healthy as any man could be, I was made to appear a complete valetudinarian. I had no pleasure in going to see either of them, for I was always regaled by Caroline with all the faults of Lavinia,—the disagreeable bad habits of her children, and the selfish bear she had for a husband; if I went to see Lavinia, the very same remarks were made upon Caroline and her belongings. They were so jealous of each other that I dared not give one a present but the other must have a similar gift. No scolding wife ever played the tyrant over a yielding husband more completely than did my sisters over me. Sometimes, goaded to an unwonted

state of anger, I would confide my injuries to Bridget, my old housekeeper, and she would soothe my ruffled temper by loading the whole of my relations with such a burden of misdemeanours, that I forgot my injuries in taking up the cudgels on their behalf. And when I had beaten Bridget into a corner, she would throw her last shaft at me, and say, "Well, Mr Peter, it serves you right; you ought to be married, and have some lady to tease you and please you at home. 'Too old!' you're 'never too old to mend; remember old age is honourable,—but old bachelors is abominable'."

With this poetical quotation Bridget would leave me to my own reflections, and not pleasant ones either. What was the use of everybody saying the same thing? All my acquaintances declared it was a shame that I was not married. I agreed with them, but the shame was not mine. I had asked, at various times of my life, four separate young ladies to be Mrs Peter Trotman. The first burst into a fit of laughter; the second never understood that I had proposed to her; the third, I believe, was sorry for me, but she was already engaged; and the fourth, when she learned my income, wondered at my effrontery, True, since I had possessed the £20,000, I had never asked the hand of any

one, because I wanted the heart too, and even £20,000 could not buy that.

In the autumn of last year my loneliness seemed to have gained its climax. My only remaining bachelor friend got married, and left me without any one to take my summer tour with, to drop in upon and smoke a cigar with, or accompany on a day's excursion. I felt more desolate than ever. Lavinia and Caroline declared it was disgusting in a man of Thompson's age to marry (he was forty-nine); that he must know it was only for his money (he had £300 a-year); and that he would live to rue it.

Christmas drew nigh: I dared not stay in town, for my sisters were not on friendly terms, and if I went to dine with one I should never spend a peaceful hour again with the other. Again, if I dined with neither, they would combine in bewailing my want of affection, and in abusing the friend of whose hospitality I had partaken. So I made up my mind to accept an invitation from an old chum, who had recently obtained the management of the Bank at Smarden, in Dorsetshire. Sometimes I quite regretted my good old godmother's bequest, for when I was a bank clerk, with £250 a-year, I *could* do as I liked, at least people didn't much care whether I came or not. But now, if I ventured to refuse an

"How it all happened," etc. I.

invitation, I received such pathetic appeals to our "old and valued friendship," that, rather than incur such another moving epistle, I inconvenienced myself, and often went out when I would rather have stayed at home.

As the day drew near on which I was expected at Smarden I heartily wished I had not accepted the invitation, for it was unusually cold, and each day threatened a fall of snow. It was Bridget's advice that I should go to Weymouth, sleep there, and go on the next day. Upon this advice I acted, and as I did not wish to arrive too early at my friend's house, I thought it would be better to have my dinner at the comfortable hotel I put up at in Weymouth, and then I should reach Smarden about seven, in time for a nice country tea. So four o'clock found me comfortably seated in a comfortable carriage, with three or four other passengers. But, alas for our hopes of arriving at Smarden at seven o'clock! In the first place, we did not start for an hour, as we had to wait for an excursion train from London, to join our already enormous string of carriages. Then, every five minutes there was a station, and I suppose each person in the village received a parcel, packed under a system peculiar to that line,—viz. that the last packed were

the last delivered, and consequently the first deliveries were under all the rest. Then there was such a shaking of hands between the guards and the station-masters, between the travellers getting out and those who remained behind, that I began to resign myself to the idea of being quite given up by my friends, and of spending the night at the Smarden Station, or perhaps in the carriage I was in,—the latter not a bad idea, for I was tolerably warm and comfortable, as well as very sleepy. This was my last impression. The next thing I heard was, “Smarden, Smarden!” Why, I had been dreaming that I had reached my journey’s end, and here we were! Dear bless my heart, the train was moving on. I jumped up, opened the door, and hallooed to the porter, when I was caught hold of by somebody, who said, “What place did he say?” “Smarden,” I answered. “Why, I am going there; don’t let the train go on,—I must get out.” “Then you’d better look sharp, ma’am,” said the porter, who had just come up. In a moment I, with my portmanteau, and a lady, with some bundles and bandboxes, were standing breathless on the platform, looking at the train disappearing. I turned to the porter to ask him if he would get me a fly.

“A fly!” he repeated; “why, ain’t you got

nothing to meet you? You won't get no flies here; you should have gone on to Smarden."

Before I had time to answer—before I could get another opportunity of speaking, my lady companion had discovered, by a string of exclamations and questions, that the station was the one before Smarden,—that I had been mistaken, and that she and I were left at Dilcott, ten miles from our destination, without any means of being accommodated for the night, and no conveyance of any kind to be obtained. At length, driven to madness by hearing her declare that my mistake was a shameful trick; that she would have me before the magistrates; that she would report the guard for putting her into a carriage with an abominable person, who played off drunken tricks on respectable people; I could stand it no longer. So, louder than I ever spoke before, I now demanded of the porter if he had not called Smarden? I did not deny that I was asleep, but I was sure that I was aroused by the word Smarden, and that I distinctly heard him repeat it three times."

"Well, la! I dare say you did, 'cause you see Squire Bond gived his dinner to-day, and I didn't want none of them farming chaps left here, so as it was the last train, I woke 'em up by calling,

‘Any more for Smarden?’ and I dare say I did finish up with Smarden two or three times,—so would you, too, if you’d got to holler much after such a day as I’ve had.”

I turned to the lady, “Now, madam, you see how you misjudge me by calling a mistake arising from this man’s senseless folly, a drunken trick of mine.” I felt my temper rising, and continued, “and I would beg to inform you, madam, that, however unfortunate this accident is, I am a respectable person from London.”

“London, indeed!” she retorted angrily, “I don’t think any the better of you for that. You may be a respectable man, but you’re an uncommonly senseless one, to go bundling out of a train, and persuading a lady alone to act as foolishly.”

Then, as a sense of her unfortunate condition dawned upon her, she burst into a flood of tears, which quite broke down all my hot anger, and filled me with annoyance at myself and compassion for her.

“My dear madam,” I said.

“Don’t ‘dear madam’ me, sir,” she sobbed. “Oh! what shall I do, left behind at this hour alone? My poor Susan will think I am killed.”

“Don’t take on so, ma’am,” said the porter;

"where might you be going to? Come into the station. I'll unlock the waiting-room, and we'll see what can be done." So clinging to the porter, the poor lady suffered herself to be conducted in, I following, crestfallen and laden with her packages.

When we were in the room I found my fellow-traveller was thin and sharp-featured, between fifty and sixty years of age, with a something about her that proclaimed her at once a maiden lady; and in that dreadful room (is there anything so forlorn-looking as a waiting-room at night in winter, without a fire and with only one gaslight?) we sat down to discuss what was to be done.

"And where are *you* going to, sir?" demanded the porter.

"Smarden; but never mind me," I said, "this lady is my first concern: for, madam," I said, turning to her, "the only way I can at all atone for the inconvenience I have put you to, is by endeavouring to convey you home as soon as possible." Then I began questioning the porter, and from his answers I found we were two miles from the village. When we got there, there was no inn. There was "The Jolly Waggoner;" but the very name sent a thrill of agony through the poor lady.

'No! they had no flies.'

"Well, there's Huckstable's cart," continued the porter, "he might do it, but Smarden Regis (where the lady wants to go) is good six miles from Smarden."

All at once a brilliant idea struck him: Squire Bond was going to send for his parcels, and Joinings was in the way of Smarden Regis; he knew the man wasn't to "deliver 'em at big house" till morning; for something handsome *he* might be induced to take us.

I consulted the lady, who, being quite hysterical, rather perplexed me by appealing to my feelings if my own wife were in such circumstances.

"All I can say, madam, is, that if she were (for I could not of course explain that I had no wife) I could only hope she would be with some one who felt as sorry for his misfortune and as anxious for her comfort as I do for yours. I shall not leave you until I see you safe, and there is my card, madam, to show you that I—I am no impostor, and am on my way to visit my friend Mr Jennings, the manager of the County Bank.

This somewhat soothed my companion. She put on her glasses and read Jennings' letter, which I handed to her. She said she knew Mr Jennings, was satisfied now that I was a gentleman, and

begged pardon for any detrimental or personal remarks she might have made, although she hoped I would not overlook the dreadful dilemma she was placed in. Then the tears began to flow afresh.

Our friend the porter turned out to be a most energetic, praiseworthy man, and full of resources. He suggested that perhaps I had "a little spirits" with me which would revive the lady. And I really had such, for not being sure that in this rural atmosphere I should not find a pervading taste for everything British, I had provided myself with a small bottle of Cognac, in case of mince pies and such like disagreeing with me. He made some water hot, and in spite of the poor lady's declarations that she could not think of it, as she was not accustomed to any stimulant but *sal volatile*, we made her take some, and she certainly felt better after it.

It was past eleven o'clock before the cart arrived. The driver excused himself for the late hour, and interested the porter at once by telling him of his having met one Simmons at the "Jolly Waggoner." "And the first words he says was, 'Where's old Dawe?' he says." This question seemed to be a joke of the highest order, and quite restored the porter's good humour; so, after some considering

and debating I made an offer, and was declared to have "done the thing handsome." Dear me! I can see the scene now—the dark night, the cart (a very rustic affair, without springs), with the driver standing at the horse's head, holding his lantern; the porter running to and fro, piling up the parcels and packages in order to make our seats as comfortable as possible,—encouraging the poor lady, encouraging me, and ever and anon asking questions about his friend Simmons, and letting a chorus run through it all of "So he asked after old Dawe, did he?"

At last we were ready, and my companion was kept from lamenting aloud by her attention being drawn to the comforts by which she was surrounded. "There, ma'am, that'll do for a footstool, and there's a back like an easy-chair. Now, let me tuck in this rug snug all round you, shut your eyes, and you'll think you're in your own feather-bed."

I felt quite sorry to part with the man. He had done his best to help me through my difficulties, and, being a poor hand at words, I tried to express my gratitude in the "current coin of the realm." And I think I succeeded, for he told me he should drink my health, and make his old woman do so too; and "I wish you a safe journey, sir; he'll drive you safe, sir, and take care of you, sir;" and

as we rattled off I could hear him calling, "When you come this way again, ask for Dawe, sir. Good luck to you, sir." And one of those good spirits, who float about the air, no doubt heard the wish from the honest heart, and catching up the words flew before me, singing, "Good luck to you, good luck to you."

I need not describe the drive, how my poor companion complained, and bemoaned, and cried, and fidgeted. She had good cause too, for my teeth chattered and an icicle hung to my nose; my legs, too, were cramped,—through my having no rug but only a piece of a carpet-bag, and the end of a hard package to sit upon,—long before we drew up in front of a cottage from a window of which a light shone. To my great delight, she said she lived there, and before another word could be uttered a door flew open, disclosing light and warmth within. Somebody ran out, and cried, "Aunt Ann, is it you? Are you all right? I'm so glad. I have been frightened to death about you." I really don't know how we all got out, but we found ourselves in a little parlour, before a blazing fire, my poor lady's tears flowing faster than ever as she recounted all the misery she had gone through.

"Well, it's all over now, Aunt Ann; don't give way."

"Give way, Susan! you don't know what I've endured. I shall never survive this drive in the depth of winter."

But her niece only kissed her, took off her things, and never stopped until she had made her quite comfortable. Then she wheeled her nearer the fire, and said in the same cheery voice, "Now, auntie, you shall thaw a bit." Turning to me, she said, "I must look after you now, sir. We have been forgetting you;" and I was obliged to submit to be waited upon and have my coat helped off and my wraps undone, as well as to be drawn nearer the fire. By this time the aunt had recovered herself sufficiently to tell the story of our adventure, and as I insisted upon blaming myself, she somewhat excused me, and dwelt upon my attentions, adding, "Susan, my dear, this gentleman was on his way to spend a little time with Mr Jennings of the bank at Smarden, but he insisted on seeing me safe here. I am sure I do not know how he will reach Mr Jennings' house."

"Well, auntie, we will see about that to-morrow; fortunately we have a spare room, and, after resting," addressing me, "you may be able to find something

to take you to the Laurels, for Mr Jennings, you know, does not live at the Bank. His house is three miles on the other side of Smarden."

I hesitated, hardly knowing what to do. Our driver must return at once. He could not take me to Smarden. There was no inn near, and I could not attempt to find my way to a place I knew nothing about. Still, I did not like to encroach on the hospitality of these ladies, which humanity alone prompted them to offer. In a moment, I was rescued from the difficulty of my situation by Miss Susan, who said, "I see we all feel a little awkward, so let us introduce ourselves to each other. This is Miss Frampton, the mistress of Home Cottage, and my aunt. I am Susan Frampton. We are two maiden ladies, living alone, and therefore we have not often the pleasure of entertaining gentlemen visitors."

She paused, and I continued, "My name is Peter Trotman. I am a bachelor, and live in Fitzroy Square, London. If you and your aunt will permit me, I shall gratefully accept your invitation to remain."

"Now," continued Miss Susan, "we must all shake hands, and consider ourselves friends." And then I saw that though this young lady (she looked about twenty-five) was not pretty, she had one of

the sweetest faces I had ever seen, and her manners were so unaffected, and her voice so sweet, that it was a pleasure to hear her talk and a pleasure to look at her while you talked to her. Somehow, after I had left that bright little room, and thought of that bright little face and dainty figure moving about so quickly and quietly, seeing what you wanted before you even knew it yourself, I gave a sigh, and wished somebody would take off my £20,000, and twenty years of my age. Then, quoting Bridget, I said, "There's no fool like an old fool," and with this wise reflection, I fell asleep. When I awoke the snow was falling so thick and fast that I could see nothing beyond the tree near my window. I thought with dismay of my friend Jennings, and wondered how I was ever to reach the Laurels. It really was vexatious to feel myself intruding upon people to whom I was a stranger. So, in rather a gloomy frame of mind, I descended the stairs into the little parlour.

"Good-morning; did you sleep well?" and putting out her hand Miss Susan shakes mine cordially. Where now was the gloom? Gone, vanished in that instant, and instead, I thought what a lucky fellow I was.

"You and I are to have breakfast alone," says

this bright little fairy; "for I would not let Aunt Ann get up. She is rather stiff, poor thing, after her last night's jolting."

Unless you are a solitary being, eating your breakfast as quickly as you can, not in the best of spirits or tempers, with nobody to say a word to, nothing to look at but your newspaper and your gloomy old dining-room, you cannot enter into my delight at finding myself sitting at that little table, in the cheerful room, beside the bright fire, and opposite to me a smiling face. Yes, I *must* eat my breakfast, or I shall fall on my knees before her and beg her to keep me here, and never send me back to the dreary house I had left in Fitzroy Square. Dear me! I could dwell on every occurrence of that eventful day, for I never reached THE LAURELS, and it was not until the following morning that I took my departure from Home Cottage, and even then it was with a promise that I should call and inquire after Aunt Ann's cold before I left for London.

Of course my adventure caused much merriment to my friend Jennings and his family. From them I heard that Miss Frampton was the late doctor's sister; that Susan was his only child; that he had not been able to leave them much; and that Susan

added to their income by teaching the Rector's children.

"She is one of the nicest girls I know," added Mrs Jennings, "and the man who marries her will get a treasure."

With a very hesitating voice I asked if the treasure had yet been secured, and was answered "No, for she had never got a chance of seeing anybody. But," turning to her husband, "really, John, it would only be polite to ask her here, after their kindness to Mr Trotman as your friend" (what a delightful woman I thought her!). "Suppose we ask Miss Frampton and Susan to spend a few days with us during Mr Trotman's visit, it would seem neighbourly. So the invitation was sent and accepted, and on the day fixed I went to fetch the two ladies. The little Jenningses were to have a children's party that night, and for the first time in my life I found myself appealed to, in order to decide which would look best, scarlet or pink roses; whether the holly should remain, or be pulled into little sprigs for a new device. All the afternoon I was hammering and tying and nailing up decorations. It was "Mr Trotman, *do* help me to fix this," and up I mounted the steps, and hammered away. Before I had finished another

voice would say, "Wait till Mr Trotman comes, he'll manage it." My excitement rose every minute. I never felt of such importance in my life, and four o'clock found me with my coat off and Mary Jennings and Susan with their frocks tucked up, polishing the floor with French chalk and bees'-wax. We had to run away and dress. In the evening I was quite a master of the ceremonies, leading off the country dances, crying the forfeits, kissing the girls under the mistletoe, until I had to acknowledge to myself that I never before really knew what I had in me. All my bashfulness had vanished, and I felt twenty years younger. Fancy me, Peter Trotman, hearing, "Well, we all ought to give a vote of thanks to Mr Trotman, for he has been the very life of the party." Why, my heart felt as light as a feather, and I could have hugged the speaker, good Mrs Jennings, before her husband and her family.

That night I resolved I would make my last venture for happiness, by asking one woman more to be my wife. And if she said "No," why then I must accept my fate, and leave her my money. But I hugged the thought that most likely she wasn't aware I had any money. At all events her first kindness had been shown when she did not know that I possessed a penny.

Before my visit was out I had won my prize. Susan said "Yes;" and I know now, that in spite of the twenty years between us, it was yes to my heart, yes to my love, as truly as to my hand and name. It was settled that we were to be married in the spring. I told no one of my good fortune, but all my friends complimented me on my improved appearance; and I could even laugh when Caroline told me she feared "I was not so well as I looked," and Lavinia felt "that such spirits at my time of life were always forced." Bridget alone knew of my good fortune, and the good old soul rejoiced over it, and said she should only stop to give up the keys and show "the young missis" the store of house-linen and china, untouched since my god-mother's days.

The spring seemed long in coming, but at length, in the "merry month of May, there was a quiet wedding at Smarden Regis, and amidst a shower of tears, kisses, and old shoes, Susan and I left in the approved fashion "for the Continent." I wanted to show her the beauties of the Rhine, everything foreign being new to this little country girl, who had never been beyond Weymouth in her life. I did not wonder now at ladies liking shopping, for I thought that going with Susan to buy a bonnet

in Paris was one of the most pleasant recreations I had ever known. I wanted her to buy a dozen bonnets, each one she tried on seeming to suit her better than the last; and the good-tempered madame hinted that she wished all the monsieurs would take pattern by me.

We returned home to Fitzroy Square, and really I had no idea that that murky dwelling could have become such a cheerful abode. After a few days I confessed to Susan that I had never informed my two sisters of my intended marriage, and that until they had read the intimation in the newspapers, and received the note which accompanied the wedge of cake Susan had sent to the children, they had no idea of my intentions. Neither of them having written to me, I feel doubtful as to how they meant to behave.

"Well!" said Susan, "the best way is to take it for granted that they mean to behave kindly. So we will not stand on ceremony, but to-day you shall take me to see them."

I must say, that after I had knocked at Caroline's door, I never felt any inclination stronger than to call a cab, jump into it with Susan, and so avoid the encounter I foresaw was inevitable. But as I furtively glanced at her, she was standing so self-

possessed and unconscious (though as she has since told me she was shaking with nervousness), that I made an effort to recover myself and ask the dolorous attendant if Mrs Simpson was at home.

"Oh yes, she is," answered the maid in a tone which implied that I was fortunate in having arrived before she sunk under the load of trouble which I had caused her. Ah! thought I, now for it. I see the household has been made to groan under the recent family affliction. We were shown up into the drawing-room, compared to which the one in Fitzroy Square was a "hall of dazzling light." All the blinds were drawn down, so that no ray of sun might enter. Often as I had seen the room, the arrangement had never before filled me with such an air of unhome-like discomfort. Though it was summer, I felt quite chilly. At length there was a rustle, and Caroline and her three dreadfully well-behaved children entered. She extended a hand to me, that reminded me of taking up a fish, and when I said, "This is my wife," she turned round, and went through such a peculiar contortion of her backbone, to represent a courtesy, that my heart sank for Susan. But it did not need, for the bright little figure jumped up, and holding up her face, said, "You see, I was very impatient to see you;

you are my sister, you know, and I hope you will like me, because I intended to like you." Who could have resisted such a winning appeal? Caroline did, as far as it was possible; but she was obliged to relax a little; and then my good fairy turned to the children, telling them they must call her aunt, and come the next day and see what we had brought them from abroad. Somehow she so managed matters that my sister, when bidding us good-bye, added, "And, Peter, if you can spare an evening to your family now, perhaps you and Mrs Trotman will join our circle on Friday, as it is my birth-day, though I cannot expect it to be remembered now."

"Indeed, he *has* remembered it," exclaimed Susan, and the moment the street door has closed the artful little puss says, "My dear, you must go and buy her a present at once."

At Lavinia's we met with a very similar reception, but my Susan was determined not to take offence. Indeed it is by the force of her kindly heart that my sisters are now ashamed of being so selfish and jealous towards each other. They see it is useless to bring spiteful tales to one, who always endeavours to make the best of people and their actions, and though they will never cease to

look upon her as one who has robbed them of their brother, I don't think that in their hearts they dislike the transgressor.

We decided upon leaving Fitzroy Square, and finally settled upon a cheerful villa at Notting Hill. Dear me! I could write a volume on house hunting. "A book of disappointments and misfortunes!" most people exclaim. Nothing of the kind. Susan turned these huntings into pic-nics. At breakfast she would read of "A desirable residence at Richmond." Sounding something like what we were looking for, we thought we could not do better than go and see it. This meant, besides going over the house, a stroll under the old trees in the park, and a quiet dinner. Or it might be "A villa at Kingston," and down to the "Griffin" we would go, and after dining we would take a boat to Hampton Court; then there were the drives to Acton, Ealing, Norwood, and the Crystal Palace. Almost every time we contrived to make a day's pleasure. I felt really sorry when we put an end to our excursions by deciding upon taking "The Hollies," Notting Hill.

At first I thought I should like to be more in the country, but Susan said that it would be a pity to give up my connection with the committees of

the several charities and hospitals. She thought it became the duty of an idle man to look after the institutions which busy people could only give money to. And really I begin to feel myself of some importance, for now that I find courage to express my opinions and mention my suggestions, people seem willing enough to adopt them, and to regard them as being as good as those of other people.

Sometimes I ask myself, "Am I the same Peter Trotman, who, nervous, bashful, and discontented, lived in gloomy Fitzroy Square?" Old Bridget often says, "Why, master, you're younger than when you were a boy. I was always throwing it up to you, what a shame it was you weren't married; but I can forgive you now, for you waited until you could draw a prize." Susan would not hear of Bridget leaving us. She said she could not do without her, and I am so glad she stayed, if only to remind me of old days, and keep my heart thankful for the blessings I now enjoy.

The Jenningses and Aunt Ann were the first visitors in our new house. Susan and I were very busy getting all things ready for them, and planning some pleasure for each day. It was the first time any of them, except Jennings, had ever been in London, so you may be sure there was plenty for

them to see. When they all arrived, Aunt Ann, Mr and Mrs Jennings, Mary and Sophy, what a houseful we were! I am sure there was not a merrier party in all London, nay, in all England, than we formed. Giving enjoyment to people so ready and willing to be pleased is a real treat. Even an evening with my sisters in their most cutting mood was not at all what it used to be. It is true they regarded the Jenningses as their natural enemies, the destroyers of their family circle; for, knowing nothing of my railway adventure, they supposed it was through them that I had met Susan; they spoke of them as "those artful people who decoyed their poor brother down." But the coldness of Lavinia and the sarcasms of Caroline fell quite harmless, the only comment on them being from Aunt Ann, that "they were evidently very superior women;" to which Mrs Jennings assented, but thought "they couldn't enjoy good health."

A good many tears were shed when the day of parting came, as was natural. Still we all brightened up when I promised to take Susan down to Smarden in June, and further arranged a sea-side visit to Swanage in the autumn. Our holidays seemed never ending, one only led on to another. What could be more delightful than the early sum-

mer at Smarden, the pleasure beaming in every face in the village to see my Susan looking well, and to hear her say, as she put her arm into mine, that she had never been so happy in her life. And when autumn came, and we all met again at Weymouth, for Swanage, what a time we had there, too! Boating excursions, wandering on the shore, and picking up fossils among the rocks, until we wondered how people could go to any other place. Aunt Ann and the children have now a collection of stones and shells, which would make a good-sized grotto. Ah, what a happy life I live now. Susan has taken away all my crabbedness, and I have nothing left to desire. If any old bachelor, lonely and desolate, as I used to be, should read my story, let him follow my example. Take heart! never despair! and in the porter's words, "Good luck! good luck!"

END OF VOL. I.

Parr, Louisa,

How it all happened

Bd.: 1

Berlin 1872

P.o.angl. 18 m-22/23

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